

Alaska State Legislature

Session:
State Capitol Building, Room 111
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Phone: (907) 465-4958
Fax: (907) 465-4928



Interim:
P.O. Box 670190
Chugiak, AK 99567
Phone: (907) 694-4958
Fax: (907) 694-0549

Senate President Rick Halford District M

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Contact: Sen. Rick Halford, 465-4958

A Response to Alaska's "Suicide Epidemic" **Halford Bill Creates Panel to Review, Increase Suicide Prevention Efforts**

(JUNEAU) – Senate President Rick Halford (R-Chugiak) introduced legislation today to help solve the increasing problem of suicide in Alaska.

“Suicide is an ongoing epidemic in many parts of the state, especially rural Alaska and the Matanuska-Sustina Valley, and numbers are at an all-time high,” said Halford. “This is tragic. We must work together to reduce the toll suicide is having on the people of our state.”

Senate Bill 198 would create the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, made up of 14 members representing rural and urban Alaska. Two members from the House and two from the Senate would sit on the council. The governor would appoint ten members, including experts in substance abuse and mental health, as well as people who have been directly impacted by suicide and who work with youth across the state.

“It is devastating to lose someone to suicide at any age, but it is especially tragic to lose a young person, who has so much to live for,” said Halford. “Suicide is a cry of despair, and we need to hear that cry and respond before someone takes their own life.”

The council will focus on finding ways to reduce suicide rates, broaden public awareness of the suicide warning signs, and enhance suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state. Each March the council would submit a report to the Legislature and the governor with its findings and recommendations.

The creation of the council has bi-partisan support in the Senate. In addition to Halford, SB 198 is co-sponsored by the following Senators: Georgianna Lincoln (D-Rampart), Donny Olson (D-Nome), Lyman Hoffman (D-Bethel), Jerry Ward (R-Kenai) and Lyda Green (R-Matanuska-Susitna).

In addition to sponsoring the legislation to create the council, Halford has made other efforts to help reduce the rate of suicide in Alaska. In March, \$325,000 was added to this year's fast track supplemental budget in response to his appeal before the Senate Finance Committee.

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Comments from Sen. Halford are available on the Majority Actuality Line, 800-478-6540.