

# Alaska State Legislature

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## Senate President Rick Halford District M

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### **Senate Responds to “Suicide Epidemic”**

(JUNEAU) – The Alaska Senate passed legislation today creating the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council to help solve the increasing problem of suicide in Alaska.

“Suicide is an on-going epidemic in many parts of the state – particularly rural Alaska and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley -- and the numbers are at an all-time high,” said Senate President Rick Halford (R-Chugiak), sponsor of Senate Bill 198. “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.”

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 will submit a report to the Legislature and the governor with its findings and recommendations.

The governor will appoint 11 people to the council, 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 to the council. Two legislators from the House and two from the Senate would also sit on the council.

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).

“The Legislature’s efforts this year to help reduce suicide rates have generated a tremendous response across the state,” said Halford. “I know that countless people have been personally impacted by the tragedy of suicide. This is clearly an issue that is really important to all Alaskans.”

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.

SB 198 passed the Senate with a vote of 19 – 1, and now goes to the House for consideration.

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