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Legislature Responds to “Suicide Epidemic”

(JUNEAU) - The Alaska Legislature passed legislation in response to Alaska’s near epidemic suicide rate. SB 198, sponsored by Senator Rick Halford (R-Chugiak) establishes the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council.

The fifteen member council will be tasked with developing a plan to address Alaska’s alarming suicide rate, and enhancing suicide prevention services and programs throughout the state, and increasing public awareness of suicide warning signs. Each March the council will submit a report of its finding and recommendations to the governor.

“Suicide is clearly a serious problem, and has reached epidemic levels in many parts of Rural Alaska and the Mat-Su Valley” said Halford. “As legislators, we don’t have all the answers or know the solution, so it is critical that we get direction from those with more expertise” added Halford.

Halford’s legislation creating the suicide prevention council received strong bipartisan support in both the senate and the house, as well as from the mental health community and the Alaska Federation of Natives.

“Suicide is a tragedy that has impacted countless Alaskans. The recommendation of this council will provide the legislature and the governor much needed guidance in addressing Alaska’s suicide epidemic,” said Halford.

Earlier this session, at Halford’s urging, the legislature included \$325,000 for suicide prevention in the fast track supplemental budget.

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