

Alaska State Legislature



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Rokeberg's API Replacement Bill Becomes Law **Governor Signs Off on Legislature's Plan to Build New Hospital**

(ANCHORAGE) – A bill sponsored by Rep. Norman Rokeberg (R-Anchorage) to build a replacement for the aging Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) became law today, concluding years of legislative effort to ensure Alaskans access to modern mental health services and providing for expansion of a medical campus in Anchorage.

“This is a great day for Alaskans, demonstrating that the Alaska Legislature takes seriously its responsibility to provide for the health care needs of all citizens,” said Rokeberg. “This new law not only provides the funding necessary to build a new \$41.7 million API, it lays the groundwork to expand the surrounding areas into an important center for medical training, public health administration, corrections and public service for Alaska.”

Rokeberg attended a ceremony at the API site on Providence Drive, where Gov. Tony Knowles officially signed House Bill 76 into law, putting a ceremonial cap on a years-long process to replace API. The 39 year-old asbestos-laden structure does not meet current building or safety codes, but as it cannot legally turn away civilly committed patients, or those sent by the courts for evaluation, it has a chronic problem with overcrowding. All previous attempts at replacement have failed, including a recent effort to renovate and use a nearby private hospital.

HB 76 authorizes the state to issue \$16 million in certificates of participation -- financial instruments similar to bonds -- that will be added to \$19.2 million remaining from previous legislative appropriations for API. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, which has committed \$3 million to the project, also donated the land on which it will be built. The rest of the money will come from investment earnings on these funds, Rokeberg said.

“Alaska has a responsibility to provide for its residents’ health, including mental health,” said Rokeberg. “It’s been clear for years that we’ve needed a new facility to replace API, and the financial resources provided by this bill, combined with the cooperation demonstrated by all the parties involved, are combining to finally make it a reality.”

The new API will maintain a small forensic psychiatric unit, which will allow the hospital to maintain the level of services available to Alaskans under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections.

The bill also incorporates a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, the Department of Health and Social Services, the University of Alaska, and Providence Alaska Medical Center, which are either involved in providing medical and mental health services, or which have current facilities near the current API site. The agreement establishes the framework for land exchanges and other commitments that will facilitate replacement of API.

Rokeberg credited Rep. Eldon Mulder (R-Anchorage), co-chair of the House Finance Committee, with working with the MOU signatories to win agreement on the land exchanges, and with identifying certificates of participation as a funding mechanism that would provide the financing necessary to replace API.

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