

Senator Gray-Jackson's Notes
Midtown Community Council
April 12, 2023

- The Council of State Governments (CSG) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor's State Exchange on Employment & Disability (SEED), convened the *Mental Health Matters: National Task Force on Workforce Mental Health Policy*. I was invited to be a member of the Task Force and joined a committee that addresses behavioral health workforce shortages.

During the pandemic, our community encountered increased demand for counselling and therapy. As mentioned in earlier notes, I introduced SB24, which amends State Statutes to include Mental Health with other educational programs for students from K-12. The Bill was first heard in the Education Committee and was also heard and held in Health Committee. I anticipate the bill making it to the finish line prior to the end of the session. I will always make addressing mental health issues a priority within our community.

- I was also appointed to the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council which advises the Governor and Legislature on issues relating to suicide. In collaboration with communities, faith-based organizations, and public-private entities, the Council works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans by reducing suicide and its effect on individuals and communities.
- SB22 making Juneteenth a paid state holiday was heard on Tuesday, April 4th in the Finance Committee and we are now waiting on the next hearing. In 2021, President Biden signed a bill making Juneteenth a Federal Holiday and, most recently, the Anchorage Assembly unanimously approved an ordinance making Juneteenth a Municipal holiday. I anticipate this Bill making it to the finish line during this session.
- HB23, a companion bill to SB30, recognizing Filipino Heritage Month in State Statutes was unanimously approved by the House on March 31st. HB23 will be the moving bill and was introduced on the Senate floor with a vote anticipated soon.
- **Budget-** The House is currently addressing HB39, the Operating Budget with many amendments being offered on the floor. They are scheduled to vote on the budget today but, once the House votes on the budget, it will be sent to the Senate for consideration.

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- **SNAP**- The Governor signed fast-track legislation on March 31st that would speed up recertifications for SNAP. This should address the thousands of Alaskans and ensure there is food on their tables. This fast-track funding source will include hiring additional eligibility technicians and contractors to address the Medicaid redetermination, public assistance backlog, and SNAP Benefits.
- April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Alaska is first in the nation for rapes per 100,000 people. We lead 148 to 100,000 people. That is nearly double for the second highest state at 77 per 100,000 people in Arkansas. In the United States about 43.6% of women, and 24.8% of men have experienced some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. In Alaska alone 59% of Alaskan women have experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence.
- April is also Celebrate Diversity month which addresses the growing multiculturalism within the community and nation. There is an urgency to understand cultures, traditions, and create a better world. Alaska has the highest census count of American Indians in the nation at 15% of the population; it is also ranked in top 10 of Asian residents. We are number seven with 54.2% of Asian populations and a majority of that is of Filipino heritage.

Always representing your interests!



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