



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD  
ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM  
AND DRUG ABUSE

431 North Franklin Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Main: 907.465.8920  
Fax: 907.465.4410

January 3, 2024

Board of Trustees  
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority  
3745 Community Park Loop  
Anchorage, AK 99508

Re: Governance Discussion

Dear Trustees,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse on the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority's Governance Discussion.

As statutory advisors to the Trust, our role is to ensure that Trustees are equipped to make well-informed decisions encompassing mental health, substance use disorders, and the intersections of the two across Trust beneficiary groups.

The Boards have enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the Trust, and value our opportunities to speak to the Trustees in quarterly presentations. The Boards have been similarly privileged to receive regular support from Trust staff, which has been critical in the continuity of efforts for our Boards, especially during challenging times. Trust staff attend and present at our meetings, are on a first-name basis with our board members, and routinely participate in hiring panels for Board staff. Trust Program Officers are frequently consulted for subject matter expertise, historical knowledge, and administrative support, and are critical components in our office's operations.

While we appreciate efforts to enhance the relationship with Trustees, we propose **removing** the designation of "*primary interface for statutory advisory boards*" from the Trustee charter (packet page 9, section 12b) and continuing the beneficial staff-to-staff collaborations.

The Boards would like to offer caution **against** the proposed *revision of committee structure* throughout the charters. The existing committee of the whole structure has

proven effective and ensures that all Trustees are educated on all areas the Trust presides over. Participation in all committees ensures all Trustees are operating with the same information, which decreases the amount of orientation (and time) at full-board meetings. Given the substantial impact that committee-approved awards of up to \$500,000 has on beneficiaries' lives, decisions should reflect diverse perspectives, and not be reliant on a one or two individuals. Diverse and comprehensive deliberation leads to outcomes that encompass a broad range of viewpoints, ensuring robust decision-making processes.

Finally, the Boards recommend that the proposed changes to the *Charter of the CEO* be **rescinded and reevaluated** with stakeholder input. The pace of change in our world demands agility, and the Trust has historically been swift in response. Restricting the CEO's authority may hinder the Trust's ability to respond as rapidly as it did during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEO of the Trust has successfully awarded grants, responded to legislative inquiries, and managed a staff in such an effective manner that the recent changes in critical leadership positions did not result in a decrease in productivity.

The proposed decrease in funding authority would add several hours, if not days to the work of committees and the full board, which will decrease the public participation in a critical process. The suggested alterations in funding authority would unnecessarily prolong decision-making processes, impeding public participation. Reporting requirements could cause confusion and delays in essential funding for behavioral health services. These changes would burden not only the Trust but also the advisory boards and other reliant entities. We express full confidence in the Trust's staff and leadership and advocate for a charter that reflects their competencies and successes.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing our shared efforts on behalf of Alaskans.

Sincerely,



James Savage, Chair  
Alaska Mental Health Board



Renee Schofield, Chair  
Advisory Board on Alcoholism and  
Drug Abuse