

**Senator Gray-Jackson's Notes**  
**Spenard Community Council**  
**April 5, 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 will be heard on Tuesday, April 4<sup>th</sup> in the Finance Committee. With the dire revenue forecast, the goal is to avoid a fiscal note. Therefore, a committee substitute will be considered to swap out Seward's Day, which is a paid State holiday, with Juneteenth.
- HB23, a companion bill to SB30, recognizing Filipino Heritage Month in State Statutes was unanimously approved by the House on March 31<sup>st</sup>. HB23 will be the moving bill and will be introduced on the Senate floor next week.

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- **Budget-** The House Finance Committee is working on the budget with highlights on addressing the Permanent Fund distribution options and the Base Student Allocation. It is anticipated that the Budget will be on the House floor for a vote next week. Once the House votes on the budget, it will be sent to the Senate for consideration.
- **SNAP-** The Governor signed fast-track legislation on March 31<sup>st</sup> 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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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elvi Gray-Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and "J".

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