

Date: April 1, 2016

House Finance Committee Members;

Representative Neuman

Representative Thompson

Dear Legislators:

This is in response to the Governor's Council on Disabilities letter dated March 29, 2016. That letter contains misrepresentations of the current educational situation at North Star Behavioral Health, serious errors to the content of the bill and several insinuations that question the integrity of me and North Star Behavioral health. We have worked for the past 6 years to engage the ASD in discussions around the inequity of the education for students in mental health treatment facilities.

**The council states,**" The legislation was allegedly developed to address the legitimate concerns regarding the education of students at North Star". The House Education committee sent a sub- committee to North Star over the interim to study the issue presented on the education of this population of students. That sub-committee reported back to the whole committee their findings of the inadequacy of the ASD in responding to the educational needs of this population of students.

We are grateful for the limited progress that the ASD has made in relation to instructing this unique population of students during the 2015-2016 school year. It was not until after the last session, that ASD made a concentrated effort to remedy the educational deficiencies they themselves identified.

**The Council speaks of the ASD 16 areas of improvement.** Of those, 11 are improvement areas that deal with administration responsibilities and not direct student instruction. We are looking for more than a supportive educational system for this population of kids as described in their 16 areas of improvement. We are seeking educational accountability and equity for children in treatment facilities.

**The Council asks if this can be solved without legislation.** We did not start advocating for any legislation until we had worked for years to resolve the inequitable educational situation at North Star. The bill was never presented without sponsors, however; we did reach out early on to all stakeholders to alert them to the situation, our attempts to resolve, and our desire to provide equitable education opportunities to all students in our facility.

**The council asks if an RPTC is better at delivering educational services than a school district.** This is ironic and duplicitous since North Star has pleaded with ASD for 6 years to step up and fulfill its obligations to this population of students. ASD has failed to do so. Only this year, after HB 102 was moving, has this district taken any interest in correcting the lack of education for these students.

The bill addresses how quality education will be addressed by North Star on page 3, starting on line 16, “the following provisions will be included in the contract:

- Teacher to student ratio;
- A description of the educational program and how it aligns with state content standards;
- A description of student assessments provided in the educational program and an agreement that the center will administer those assessments required by the state;
- Written objectives for student achievement;
- The center’s plan for providing special education, vocational education, gifted education and bilingual education; an educational program and calendar;
- A description of staff development activities;
- Documentation that a teacher possesses a valid teacher certificate issued by the department and meets training requirements as outlined in AS 14.30.250”.

**The council asks if this legislation will restrict parental access to their children.** This is again concerning as it belies that the council has not read or heard the testimony of parents describing their frustration with the ASD and how they are not allowed to be a part of the educational process while their child is in treatment. North Star is committed to an educational

partnership with families, resident schools, and students to develop the individual educational program that best fits the students' needs and leads to his or her educational success.

**The Council also expresses concern over IDEA laws and Special Education.** The bill openly discusses this on page 3, line 30: the RPTC must include “(10) documentation that a person who possesses a valid administrative certificate issued by the department under AS 14.30.255 will administer special education services;” and again on page 4, line 6, (12) “the center will follow procedures established by the department to comply with federal law, including 20 U.S.C. 1400-1482 IDEA.”

**Lastly, the Council raises the concern this will negatively impact rural schools.** No contracts will be negotiated with any school district except the district where the facility is located. The council does not have full knowledge of how the enrollment of these students is currently taking place as this bill will not change the current practice of enrollment of the child. Rural and resident schools will feel the positive effects of this bill by having a voice in the student's education while in treatment, being informed of a students' progress, and being involved in meetings regarding the student and his or her return to the resident school.

This is a three year pilot project with a sunset date in 2020. The option for a pilot project was taken so treatment facilities could collect data and show outcomes of their educational program to all stakeholders involved. The goal is to have clear, concrete, best practice decisions made as we move forward with educating this unique population.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the continued educational issues students face while receiving mental health treatment. If you have questions I am always available by phone 907-903-5081 or call Ray Gillespie at 907-230-8843.

Respectfully,

Evelyn Alsup

Director of Education

North Star Behavioral Health