



NEWS FROM MARY

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Addressing Inhalant Issues

Camai!

I was pleased to see the efforts of residents and service providers in Bethel to hold the **Third Annual Inhalant Abuse Prevention Conference**. My congratulations and thanks to YKHC for leadership in this important issue. My staff member, Trim Nick, came back with a wealth of discussion points to share. Quyanah!

In the State Legislature we work on many issues of importance to residents of Alaska, and it is easy for some legislators to think of issues of substance abuse, including inhalants, as somebody else's problem. I view inhalant abuse not only as an issue of importance but one of hope. Like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, this is an area where the work we do really can make a difference because prevention has such a positive result. If you don't use the substance, you don't get the problems that are caused by the substance.

This session I introduced legislation aimed at addressing inhalant abuse problems. I had listened to the concerns of many providers working with young people, and I have heard the frustration of VPSO's and others who feel helpless when they see a young person huffing. I was asked to look at legislation introduced by other states. Thirty-three other states have passed laws related to inhalant abuse. I asked our legal staff to draft a bill for Alaska that could be used as a tool in redirecting the abuser toward making healthier choices in his or her life. The result was HB 375 which was introduced this session.

I had hoped **House Bill 375** would be a starting point for discussion, and we've had some terrific feedback from people who have been working on the issue. The **House Health, Education and Social Services Committee** assigned the bill to subcommittee. We've had two very productive work sessions, and I hope to have the bill scheduled before the full House HESS Committee in the near future so that a broader audience will be able to provide additional points-of-view.

With the attention HB 375 gets in House HESS and further work over the interim months, I plan to re-introduce legislation next session. It has become clear in our discussions so far that the best of all worlds is to have a place where an inhalant abuser can go for inhalant abuse treatment. That dream will become reality in the near future with YKHC's successful lobbying effort for federal funding for a treatment center in Bethel.

Mary

HB 375 - Relating to Abuse of Inhalants by Rep. Mary Kapsner

As introduced HB 375 would do the following:

Section 1. Create a crime of abuse of inhalants. Smelling or inhaling would have to be intended for intoxication. Penalty is a class B misdemeanor.

Section 2. Inhalants would be added to the involuntary commitment statutes found in Title 47.

Questions:

If the goal is to provide leverage to get a person to treatment, does the abuse need to be a criminal offense? Should it be a misdemeanor?

How can we get people into treatment without making them criminals?

Would a provision for a suspended imposition of sentence serve the need? In other words, a person could agree to treatment and the penalties would be suspended while the individual was in treatment. They would be discharged upon successful completion of the program.

What's do the penalties mean?

Class B Misdemeanor:	Violation:
maximum fine: \$1,000	\$300.00
maximum jail: 90 days	(non-criminal)



Bethel Alternative School Student Paula Albert was recognized by the Governor in his State of the State Speech for her efforts in the area of inhalant abuse.