



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, December 1, 2018

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DHSS Works with North Star Hospital to Open More Emergency Mental Health Beds

Anchorage – Yesterday the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services entered into a contract with North Star Hospital to make 14 beds available to the State of Alaska for voluntary and involuntary behavioral health patients as well as alcohol and chemical dependency patients. This measure will help alleviate pressure on Alaska’s behavioral health system and the shortage of beds available at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API).

“We thank our partners at North Star Hospital and staff at the DHSS Division of Behavioral Health for working together to get this contract in place,” said DHSS Commissioner Jay Butler. “Alaska is currently experiencing a mental health capacity crisis and a serious lack of beds to treat Alaskans in need of psychiatric care. This agreement will allow patients experiencing a mental health crisis to be treated sooner and in the most appropriate setting possible.”

Under the contract, North Star Hospital is now identified as a designated facility that can take involuntary mental health commitments. The department will be able to transfer some patients who are subject to a 30-day civil commitment order to North Star Hospital to receive care.

A 30-day civil commitment is ordered by a judge after a person has received an order for evaluation and the results of that 72-hour evaluation results in a petition commitment to a treatment facility. North Star Hospital will provide treatment during that involuntary commitment period, but will not accept mental health holds off the street prior to a 30-day order being issued.

North Star Hospital has agreed to provide a minimum of five beds for involuntary civil commitments; the nine remaining beds will be used for voluntary behavioral health patients and voluntary substance use disorder treatment. The hospital may opt to use all 14 beds for involuntary civil commitment patients.

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