

## Senate bills would help protect rights of psychiatric patients

Senate Bill 186 was introduced to protect and guarantee by state law all psychiatric patients' right to file a grievance.

Psychiatric patients in acute-care facilities almost without exception have dementia or diminished capacity. SB 186 needs to pass to protect psychiatric patients.

Senate Bill 8 requires psychiatric facilities, including acute-care facilities, to make a good-faith effort at providing the patient's choice of gender of staff for intimate care services. The passage of this bill will reduce trauma to psychiatric patients, a high percentage of whom have experienced sexual or physical abuse in their backgrounds.

We encourage the general public, news outlets and institutions to support the passage of these bills.

— *Faith Myers and Dorrance Collins*  
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## Shortening the legislative session would hurt the average citizen more

Shortening the legislative session will hurt the average citizen trying to improve rights for Alaskans ("90-day limit might control Legislature," June 26).

The table has been set. There is a limited number of representatives. The oil giants will always have their seats at the table, along with the billion-dollar health care industry. It is the crumbs that fall off the table that the average citizen can pick up. If the voters in November choose to shorten the legislative session, the table will get a lot smaller.

Since 2000, there have been nine special sessions called. Even putting aside that issue, Alaska is still a relatively young state trying to get its feet on the ground. Not only should the legislative session not be shortened to 90 days, it should be lengthened to 150 days.

— *Faith Myers and Dorrance Collins*  
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## Developmentally disabled need a much better grievance procedure

Half a world away children with severe emotional or physical disabilities are tied to a bed and left untouched. The recent newspaper stories and television images were powerful and we believe will bring about changes to an abusive system.

It is the ability to be heard that most often brings about change. In our opinion, the state of Alaska has terrible grievance procedure statutes and associated rules concerning the rights of individuals with a developmental disability or mental illness.

The state does not keep clear statistics on the number and type of grievances filed by patients at the state Division of Behavioral Health's 82 grantee facilities.

A patient or client age 60 or older with a grievance can call the Long Term Care Ombudsman office for assistance. But there is no similar state office for psychiatric patients or those with a developmental disability, under age 60, to call for assistance.

We agree with helping people half a world away, but changes need to be made in Alaska. Statutes and regulations concerning grievance procedures for psychiatric patients and those with developmental disabilities need to be revised. Statistics need to be kept of the type and number of grievances filed. And a state office has to be established to oversee and assist in the grievance process.

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