

March 25, 2019

Dear Representative Kreiss-Tomkins,

My name is Christopher Dietrich. I am currently a practicing PA providing medical care throughout Alaska. This letter is to support reducing barriers to care for patients involving advanced health practitioners. I am offering my support for House Bill 97 addressing the ability to Physician Assistants to establish care for patients via telemedicine. With recent legislation passage of Senate Bill 74 in 2016, advanced level practitioners gained allowable practice to treat patients and establish care via telemedicine. Care requirements did not change under this practice and standard of care still applies to ensure that improving access does not lessen quality. The bill appears to have left out direct language to be applicable for Physician Assistants to establish care via telemedicine. Physician Assistants have played a significant role in Alaska in expanding care to the underserved and acting as medical extenders to patient care teams.

As a psychiatric provider treating pediatric patients, at risk youth, and some of our most underserved populations; the barrier of care establishment is vast and unnecessary. I provide care to remote patients across rural Alaska. Currently the guidelines of telemedicine make our ability to provide care difficult with undue burdens on our patients. In psychiatry, this can delay care and create a barrier to services. As many of residents know all too well, traveling to a clinic to receive services is not something always easily done. Requiring a face to face exam in person creates an additional requirement for our patients that has no evidence based benefit in changing outcomes. This can require them additional costs for travel and decrease the patient outcomes for recovery due to delays in treatment.

I have had many pediatric patients that may have significant trauma be seen via telemedicine and subsequently diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These patients may reside in a rural location and an alternative psychiatric provider may not be easily available for weeks to months. Delaying the ability to establish care drastically increases the morbidity to these patients and is harmful to their recovery. HB97 has the potential to continue promote what SB74 was intended by increasing access options for our state.

PA's such as myself are pleased to support your efforts on behalf of HB97. For further information, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact me at: chris@obhn.org.

Regards,

Christopher D. Dietrich, PA-C, PSY-CAQ
Assistant Medical Director
Orion Behavioral Health Services

President, Board of Directors
Alaska Collaborative of Telehealth & Telemedicine.

Health Practitioner
Department of Corrections, State of Alaska