

February 5, 2018

Representative Matt Claman and Representative Chuck Kopp
State Capitol Room 118
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representatives Claman and Kopp:

We are writing to thank you for sponsoring HB 312, "an act relating to arrest without a warrant for assault in the fourth degree at a health care facility; and relating to an aggravating factor at sentencing for a felon offense against a medical professional at a health care facility."

Alaska hospitals have reported an increase in workplace violence over the past year, including assaults with physical injury against caregivers. Staff report feeling unsafe in the workplace. They experience being kicked, punched, spit on or verbally threatened all too often. This should not be an acceptable workplace hazard. Unfortunately, for many nurses, physicians, and other caregivers, this has become the new normal.

The escalating concern at the staff level also has implications for other patients as resources are redeployed to address escalations. We have added security and implemented behavioral contracts for those with a history of violence, which has helped to some extent. We are in the process of training our employees on management and response strategies and have expanded our list of "risk factors" to increase our awareness of potential concerns.

Many assaults fall into the category of fourth degree assault in which an officer must have a warrant to arrest an individual. We have learned that this process may be part of the reason that police often cite and leave an individual on scene rather than arresting them. We support making it easier for law enforcement to remove perpetrators of assault by eliminating the need for a warrant when an assault has occurred at our health care facility.

We also support allowing sentences to be imposed above the presumptive range for felon offenses against a medical professional at a health care facility. This sends a clear message to our health care providers that they are supported and valued.

We recognize legislation is only one potential solution to the complex problem. To successfully address this issue, each facility needs to implement a comprehensive strategy using evidence-based practices – which we have done. At the end of the day we are still behind the eight ball if limits and consequences do not exist so we greatly appreciate your willingness to be a champion for our caregivers and be their voice for the safety of everyone.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to support this moving forward. Thank you very much for your advocacy on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Julie Taylor,CEO
Alaska Regional Hospital