

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

HB 326 Naturopaths

Sponsor Statement

HB 326 establishes a clear scope of practice for naturopathic doctors, consistent with their nationally accredited education and training. In doing so, this bill will increase options, access and competition in Alaska's health care market.

Current law provides little definition of what naturopathic doctors can and cannot do. This has led to very conservative regulatory interpretations over the years, resulting in Alaska having some of the more restrictive regulations in the nation. The practicing environment has become so limited that some naturopaths have actually stopped practicing in Alaska and moved to more competitive markets.

HB 326 would correct this by outlining clear guidelines for regulators. Among other things, the bill allows licensed practitioners to perform minor office procedures, and issue vitamins, minerals and non-controlled substance prescription medications. This same scope is being practiced safely in many other states, and even by other health care providers in Alaska, with equal or lesser training.

Alaska has always been a difficult place for Naturopathic doctors to practice, but the real losers in this situation are Alaskans, who pay some of the highest health care costs in the country. In addition, many Alaskans - particularly in rural areas - struggle with basic health care access. This, combined with other factors, helps contribute to Alaska's exceptionally high rates of chronic and preventable disease.

Naturopaths specialize in preventive medicine and treatment of chronic disease. Rather than symptom and medication management, naturopathic doctors focus more on disease prevention, and on addressing the root causes of illness. In the long-run, this type of care saves money for consumers, insurers, and the state.

In our current lean fiscal environment, it is difficult to tackle our budget effectively without addressing one of the key cost drivers in Alaska: the rising cost of health care. By allowing Alaska naturopathic doctors to practice within the scope of their training and education, the clarity of HB 326 will hopefully attract more naturopaths to the state. Increasing competition and access will be good for the market, and Alaskans will have more options when choosing what style of health care is right for them.