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Governor Mike Dunleavy STATE OF ALASKA

September 3, 2021

The Honorable Peter Micciche
Senate President
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 111
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear President Micciche:

Our state government continues to meet the challenges on our healthcare infrastructure, which include staffing shortages, capacity constraints, and increased hospitalization rates that occur seasonally, in addition to the current rise in COVID-19 cases. Yesterday, I amended the Third Special Session Proclamation to offer tools that, if passed by the Legislature, would help with the capacity constraints our hospitals are facing. These proposals are by no means the only items this Administration has, and continues to undertake, in meeting the public health needs. Rather, these are the items that require legislative approval to go into effect.

Some groups, and some legislators, have called on me to issue another Disaster Declaration related to COVID-19. I have no intention of doing that. Issuing a Disaster Declaration should be used sparingly, in the direst circumstances, and in the absence of a viable alternative. I take the issue of Alaska's hospital capacity seriously. My team – in consultation with Alaska hospitals and long-term care facilities – has identified the most important actions needed to support our healthcare infrastructure, and we need the Legislature's agreement. A substantive change to law, such as enacting uncodified law for a specific period of time, requires the Legislature's consideration. It cannot be done under the authorities of the Alaska Disaster Act.

To date, nearly half the states in the country are not under a disaster declaration. This diverse group includes Wisconsin, New York, South Carolina, Colorado, and Nebraska, and they are also experiencing some of the same challenges as Alaska with respect to COVID-19. Many of those lawmakers and executives, in consultation with public health authorities, developed state-specific systems of addressing the challenges faced by what is becoming recognized as an endemic virus. Alaska did the same this year. When the disaster declarations this Administration instituted in the fall and winter of 2020 expired in February, the Legislature passed updates to the State's response to COVID-19 that were time-limited, and required more interaction with the appropriating branch of government. We are now approaching two years in an environment where the virus is circulating and impacting the world; the virus is now endemic, it is among us. Recognizing the reality of the virus, this Administration is adapting and proposing changes that make the response to the challenge more durable, and not subject to the whims of 30-day proclamations or health orders.

I respectfully request action on the agenda items I transmitted this week to accelerate the State's COVID-19 response. These tools will be effective without the need for mandates or restrictions to personal rights. These proposals are system changes, and they are direct requests from the same Alaska hospitals that have been asking for help.

The Honorable Peter Micciche
September 3, 2021
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Senate Bill 67/House Bill 83, would allow Alaska to join the Multistate Nurse Licensure Compact. Our State has seen a concerted effort by the legislature, health care industry, and the University of Alaska for over a decade to increase the number of nurse professionals, this continues to be the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association's top legislative priority. At a time when hospitals are experiencing tremendous vacancies in nursing positions, being part of a group of 34 states that license and allow movement of these health professionals cuts through significant red tape and gets qualified nurses into healthcare facilities rapidly. I appreciate the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee taking this bill up next week. This Administration has entered into GSA contracts that allow for healthcare professionals to come to Alaska when they become available, and this setup has proven successful in other states, and it is expected that as the delta variant surge subsided in parts of the country that personnel will become available.

I have also introduced Senate Bill 3006 and its House companion bill, to be introduced in the following week. This measure accomplishes three things. First, the bill will allow expanded telehealth services until July 1, 2022, using technology to meet patients where they are instead of going to overstretched hospitals. Second, the bill waives certain requirements for the Division of Insurance to have utilization review requirements for placements in facilities, thereby discharging safe patients more efficiently, and freeing up needed bed spaces. Finally, the bill allows for background checks for health professionals to be waived by Alaska's Department of Health and Social Services if a facility can undertake the responsibility for that action. These three items will significantly help hospital capacity and workforce needs, and are direct asks by Alaska hospitals.

The Department of Health and Social Services is using part of the \$20 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to meet the challenge of hospital capacity and workforce demands. This includes incentive hiring funds for Certified Nursing Assistants to our hospitals, long-term healthcare facilities, and other needed areas. Part of the funding will go to emergency response services that divert non-emergency patients to alternative care sites, such as urgent care clinics, with the consent of both the patient and the facility.

The effort to keep our health care safety nets intact is a priority of this Administration, as evidenced by the amendment to the Special Session agenda. Though it is a holiday weekend, I respectfully request quick consideration and action on these measures.

A disaster declaration is an inappropriate response to provide assistance to hospitals with capacity. The appropriate tool is legislative action to amend current statutes, lifting constraints and provide a viable path for hospitals to increase capacity.

Sincerely,



Mike Dunleavy
Governor

cc: Senator David Wilson, Chair, Senate Health & Social Services Committee
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky, Co-chair, House Health & Social Services Committee
Representative Liz Snyder, Co-chair, House Health & Social Services Committee
Senator Mia Costello, Chair, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee
Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Co-chair, House Labor & Commerce Committee
Representative Zack Fields, Co-chair, House Labor & Commerce Committee



Governor Mike Dunleavy STATE OF ALASKA

September 3, 2021

The Honorable Louise Stutes
Speaker of the House
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 208
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Speaker Stutes:

Our state government continues to meet the challenges on our healthcare infrastructure, which include staffing shortages, capacity constraints, and increased hospitalization rates that occur seasonally, in addition to the current rise in COVID-19 cases. Yesterday, I amended the Third Special Session Proclamation to offer tools that, if passed by the Legislature, would help with the capacity constraints our hospitals are facing. These proposals are by no means the only items this Administration has, and continues to undertake, in meeting the public health needs. Rather, these are the items that require legislative approval to go into effect.

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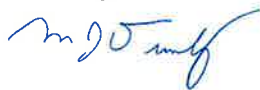
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