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Iliuliuk Family and Health Services, Inc.

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Re: Support for HB 78 Incentives for Certain Medical Providers

February 9, 2011

Dear Senate and House Members of the Alaska State Legislature:

Because the health care workforce shortage in Alaska is reducing health care access for our state's residents, Iliuliuk Family and Health Services, Inc. (IFHS) strongly supports HB 78 to establish a loan repayment and incentive program to allow Alaska to compete with the lower 48 in recruitment of providers from a shrinking national pool.

Our organization, IFHS, is the only comprehensive service provider for medical, dental and behavioral health services within 800 air miles of Unalaska. We are remote, and we frequently find that we are unable to compete with "lower 48" medical practices for providers, since we also cannot compete effectively with salaries. State loan repayment options for our providers would help us offer a competitive package.

With alarming and rising vacancy rates, Alaska is posed for a crisis without intervention. Alaska is one of only a handful of states without a state-sponsored support-for-service program such as a loan repayment and incentive program and is losing ground. The competition for recruitment of providers is very difficult. Currently only 2% of medical students nationally are choosing the primary care field; more than 90 pharmacist vacancies exist in Alaska; many communities have inadequate access to dentists; physician assistants and nurse practitioners are increasingly difficult to recruit; nurses, dental hygienists, psychologists, licensed certified social workers, and physical therapists are all in short supply in Alaska.

It takes IFHS over a year to recruit a single doctor; six months to recruit a behavioral health specialist, and the last time we recruited a dentist, it took us four years to do so. We cannot recruit RNs – until July of 2009, we had two open RN positions for over two years, and currently have one RN position that has been open for over four years. We fill this position with locums RNs, but far prefer a full-time staff RN for consistency of care to our patients. A state-sponsored support-for-service program would help make our recruitment package more appealing and more competitive.

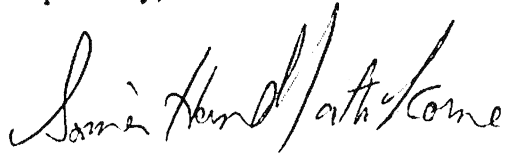
The Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program proposed in HB 78 provides an important part of the solution to the workforce shortage Alaska faces. The proposal was developed after careful review of national studies of best practices for workforce recruitment and retention and input from stakeholders statewide, including consideration of factors unique to Alaska. More cost-efficient and results-producing than other methods, loan repayment and

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incentives have been shown to effectively help alleviate shortage problems in other states. HB 78 establishes a loan repayment and incentive program customized for Alaska and will provide much needed relief for our state.

IFHS supports HB 78 and urges passage of this important legislation. Your active steps to assure the establishment of the Alaska Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program are greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sonia Handforth-Kome". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the beginning.

Sonia Handforth-Kome
Executive Director