JAMHI
Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc.

"We help adults with mental illness live their own best lives"

Quality Community Behavioral Health Services Since 1985

January 18, 2016

Representative Liz Vasquez
State Capitol Room 428
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

SUBJ: HB234 – An Act relating to insurance coverage for mental health benefits provided through telemedicine

Dear Rep. Vasquez:

Thank you for sponsoring this important bill that would provide telemedicine mental health access to many Alaskans living in rural communities. HB 234 would eliminate an existing barrier to providing telemedicine mental health services in our state. It does so by removing the requirement that prior in-person contact occur between the healthcare provider and patient before payment is made for covered services.

I represent Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc. (JAMHI), the Community Behavioral Health Center in Juneau and a provider of telebehavioral health services in Southeast Alaska. In a state as large and rural as Alaska, it is no surprise that many rural residents experience great hardship when trying to access needed medical or behavioral health services. Travel to larger communities is very expensive and at times, weather can pose unsurmountable challenges. Rural residents may postpone preventative care, medication refills, or early intervention with mental health problems until they become serious or urgent, driving up costs, increasing the likelihood of hospitalization, and reducing the likelihood of successful treatment outcomes.

As a provider of telebehavioral health services, we strongly support passage of this bill that would increase access to needed services for residents of Rural Alaska, including veterans. If you have any questions about our services, need any information I might be able to provide, please don't hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for sponsoring HB 234.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Watts
Executive Director

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