

Konrad Jackson

From: Anita Halterman
Sent: Friday, April 08, 2016 11:42 AM
To: Konrad Jackson
Cc: Rep. Liz Vazquez
Subject: FW: HB234

Konrad,

This is the email from Anne Henry which answered Rep. Hughes question that I mentioned while I was in your office.

Thanks!

Anita Halterman
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-----Original Message-----

From: Anne L. Henry, LPC [mailto:alhenry@alaska.net]
Sent: Thursday, April 07, 2016 1:47 PM
To: Rep. Shelley Hughes <Rep.Shelley.Hughes@akleg.gov>
Cc: Anita Halterman <Anita.Halterman@akleg.gov>; alhenry@alaska.net
Subject: HB234

Dear Rep. Hughes:

My name is Anne Henry. I am a licensed professional counselor holding license number 1 in the State of Alaska because I worked on the original legislation to begin licensing LPCs and then served as the licensing board chair for its initial 8

years--so I was deeply involved in writing statutes and regulations in the field. Additionally, I worked for the Division of Behavioral Health for several years as the Legislative Liaison--more statute and regulation involvement, but also a deepening commitment to the people served by the various behavioral health professionals.

I am the person who initially requested that HB234 be put forth. The Speakers office suggested that I work with Rep. Vazquez and I have spent a great deal of time working with her office, specifically with Anita Halterman.

I am writing today to clarify your question about mental health professionals who are licensed in Alaska but who live out of state and want to practice here via distance counseling.

When I went to the legislature, what I was looking for was a bill that would require insurance companies operating in the State of Alaska to be required to reimburse Alaskan licensed mental health providers for medically necessary services delivered by telemedicine to their insured Alaskans. The legal services folks took that information and delivered what is now HB234.

I have been practicing in Alaska for over 23 years and have seen so many reasons why telemedicine will improve the lives of people in this enormous state. But my immediate drive was that I have two clients who for medical reasons have a very difficult and exhausting time coming into my office for counseling. They come to see me because being relatively young people with such physical burdens is very distressing. I spoke to their insurance companies and they were denied reimbursement for counseling that was not done face to face in my office. So, the bill.

Now to your question. Yes this bill, as written, will allow for mental health professionals who live out of state to practice in Alaska ONLY if they are licensed in Alaska as a Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Psychological Associate, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Marital and Family Therapist or a Licensed Professional Counselor. This is a critical step in increasing access of Alaskans to specialists and more professionals in general, while simultaneously protecting our citizens by requiring that all of those people be licensed here and therefore be subject to our Statutes and Regulations. If they are found to be violating any of our Statutes, Regulations or codes of ethics, the appropriate licensing board can take measures necessary to remedy the situation.

People who qualify can already acquire a license for practice in Alaska while living outside, and many do. I myself am licensed in Alaska and Oregon. I am subject to the laws of practice in whichever state in which my client resides. There are many providers who come here in many roles and provide services to Alaskans, but it would often benefit their clients to be able to have more frequent contact with their practitioners. The same is true of providers who can only afford to travel to the bush for occasional client contact. In years past I flew from Anchorage to Valdez every two weeks for a day of counseling sessions. Those infrequent meetings often lead to people disappearing because they needed more support for healthy change.

I hope that helps clarify the out-of-state licensing issue for you. While I am at it I want to say that I think Dr. Evans and Anita did a good job of addressing the piece about the bill making sure that insurance companies cannot require the face-to-face meeting before reimbursement for distance counseling. The bill in no way inhibits providers from requiring a face-to-face themselves. Its just about not letting for profit companies block medically necessary work from being conducted by professionals who are trained to make such evaluations. This choice should be left to the providers in concert with the needs and situations of their clients.

Thank you for your time and also for your co-sponsorship of this bill. It really will help a lot more people than we realize.
Anne L. Henry, LPC

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