



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of  
Health and Social Services**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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April 24, 2017

The Honorable David Guttenberg  
Alaska State House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 501  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Guttenberg:

Thank you for your efforts to improve health care in Alaska. The Alaska Health Care Commission, established in FY 2011, contributed to knowledge and understanding of our health care system during the five years it was funded and active. House Bill (HB) 234 would extend the Commission's sunset date by six years to June 30, 2023, and provide the opportunity to quickly reactivate the Commission in the event the legislature or Governor deems it necessary.

Health care access and a viable and sustainable health care system are essential to the strength of our society and our economy. Alaskans cannot work, fish, hunt, or succeed in school if they are not healthy. Access to high quality affordable health care is necessary for maintaining health through preventive services, and for treatment and healing in the event of an injury or illness.

Alaska's health care providers not only deliver high quality care, but they are also employers and important contributors to our economy. Alaska needs a viable and efficient health care sector. The threat of the repeal of the Affordable Care Act at the federal level, the current state fiscal crisis, and growing concerns over the cost of care in our state, are all placing incredible pressures on our health care providers and health care system.

There currently is no formal body actively engaged in studying and developing recommendations to improve health care in Alaska. A number of the Health Care Commission's former studies are still referenced by policy leaders, stakeholders and the media, but are quickly becoming outdated. Several of the Commission's policy recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented, but there is not a public forum to facilitate updates and further development of those policies.

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The Department of Health & Social Services supports HB 234. This bill would provide the opportunity and ability to respond quickly if and when the needs arise to fund and reactivate the Alaska Health Care Commission to continue contributing to the knowledge base about health care in our state, and to develop strategies to improve health care for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Valerie Nurr'araaluk Davidson  
Commissioner

cc: Darwin Peterson, Legislative Director, Office of Governor Bill Walker