

Alaska State Medical Association

4107 Laurel Street • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • (907) 562-0304 • (907) 561-2063 (fax)

February 27, 2018

The Honorable Cathy Giessel
State Senate
State Capitol, Room 427
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Senate Bill 108 – Medical Licensing and Certified Medical Assistant

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) represents physicians statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

ASMA has followed with great interest the discussion and debate on SB 108. We believe SB 108 addresses three important issues: (1) streamlining physician licensing, (2) addresses a statutory deficiency to allow physicians to delegate routine duties to unlicensed assistive personnel, and (3) creates a new licensing/registration program for medical assistants to allow access to the Prescription Drug Database.

1) Streamlining Physician Licensing:

ASMA supports the provisions of the bill streamlining physician licensing. We believe the proposed temporary permits will maintain public protections while improving the efficiency of the licensing process. This will enable physicians to accept work and practice in Alaska serving patients in a more expedient manner.

2) Fix a Statutory Deficiency to Allow Physicians to Delegate Routine Duties to Unlicensed Assistive Personnel

Recently it was discovered that current statutes do not provide authority for a physician to delegate routine duties to unlicensed assistive personnel. Without a statutory amendment to address this issue current practice procedures throughout Alaska will have to undergo significant changes that will disrupt current practice and likely add significant costs to healthcare. A similar authority exists in AS 08.68.805 allowing the Nursing Board to address delegation of duties to unlicensed personnel and has worked well. ASMA supports adding this authority.

3) Create a New Licensing/Registration Program for Medical Assistants to Allow Access to Prescription Drug Database

This issue arises from current law restricting access to the Prescription Drug Data Base (PDMP) to agents or employees licensed or registered under AS 08. SB 108 solves this by

creating a licensure for Medical Assistants. While ASMA has been and remains a strong supporter of the PDMP, using physician time to look up patient information is costly and utilizes time that could be better spent directly with patients. ASMA strongly supports allowing physicians to delegate authority to Medical Assistants to look up information on the PDMP. While we do not oppose establishing a licensing requirement for Medical Assistants we are concerned that licensing will add cost to a healthcare system that seems to be under continuous criticism for high costs. These costs are not only State costs, but we would expect to pay licensed medical assistants more than those who are unlicensed and likely cover costs associated with licensure.

ASMA is also concerned that such licensure could lead to requirements that all Medical Assistants be licensed. This could have a significant impact in smaller markets that may not have access to a large licensed population. We are comforted by the State Medical Board's letter of February 9, 2018 that recognizes the need to allow delegation for reviewing the PDMP.

While we won't oppose licensure, we believe a more straightforward solution may be to amend Section 3 to statutorily authorize the Board to adopt regulations authorizing access to the PDMP. This could look like:

* **Sec. 3.** AS 08.64 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Sec. 08.64.106. Delegation of routine medical duties. The board shall adopt regulations authorizing a physician, podiatrist, osteopath, or physician assistant licensed under this chapter to delegate routine medical duties, including access to the prescription drug database under AS 17.30.200(D), to an agent of the physician, podiatrist, osteopath, or physician assistant. The regulations must

- (1) require that an agent who is not licensed under this chapter may perform duties delegated under this section only if the agent meets applicable standards established by the board;
- (2) require that a physician, podiatrist, osteopath, or physician assistant may not delegate duties related to pain management and opioid use and addiction;
- (3) establish a registry and require the agent to register with the Board for purposes of accessing the prescription drug database; and
- (4) define the phrase "routine medical duties."

This simple provision could allow the Board to establish standards specific to delegating access to the PDMP without creating a new licensing program.

That said, ASMA believes that overall Senate Bill 108 solves several problems facing physicians and supports its passage as written or as amended above.

Sincerely,



Peter Lawrason MD, President
Alaska State Medical Association

cc: Senate Finance members