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Dear Senator vonImhof and Senate Finance Committee,

After listening to the questions raised by the Senate Finance committee on March 1, 2019, I think I can give you some constructive information. I was on the Board of Nursing for 8 years, terming off in 2015 but have attended every meeting since that time representing the Alaska Nurses Association.

The legislative audit identified a deficiency in telehealth issues. The Board of Nursing began work on telehealth regulations but did not put forth when the Board was notified that the Board of Medicine was further along with their telehealth regulations and the BON did not want to have conflicting regulations in regards to telehealth. The BON did have regulations that had established regulations that identified that any nurse giving care to an Alaskan citizen needed to be licensed in Alaska so the public was being protected. Then the Board had a new executive that began independently with no overlap working with the previous executive. The Executive Administrator position is a very diverse job that a little mentoring would have been an asset for continuity. Unfortunately, the executive administrator position is vacant at present and the continuity from the previous administrator may cause a bit of inconsistency. In addition during this time new board members began without knowing the history of BON actions. The BON will experience some of the lack of continuity due to 6 out of 7 board members being appointed just in the past month and are waiting legislative endorsement.

As for licensing telehealth nurses differently, while an interesting idea, this would serve no purpose. All licensed nurses go through the same process and pay the same Alaska licensing fee. There is no more time spent licensing them than any other nurse. When someone receives their Alaska license, they are meeting the same criteria to be a licensed nurse to practice in Alaska. As noted in the audit there was a 42% increase in licensees. The licensing office for the BON did not permanently increase their staffing to accomplish this. Some of the increase in licensing numbers is due to telehealth but many Alaskan communities need an increase in nurses for summer employment or use travelers to supplement their staff for a variety of reasons.

If I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me. I support SB36 to extend the BON and hope this information is useful to you to make your vote to support SB 36 a reality.

Beth Farnstrom