

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel
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Senate Bill 44 Sponsor Statement **Telehealth: Physician Assistants; Drugs**

The 2016 Medicaid Reform bill (SB 74) provided for the use of telehealth by revising Alaska statutes to require the Alaska Board of Medicine to adopt regulations and guidelines for physicians rendering a diagnosis, providing treatment, or prescribing, dispensing, or administering a prescription drug to a person without conducting a physical examination under AS 08.64.364.

Unintentionally, SB 74 only addressed physicians, and the Board issued guidelines that made different requirements for physician assistants and physicians, citing a lack of legislative intent that the provisions of SB 74 should apply to PAs.

Consequently, the omission of PAs from the Medicaid Reform bill has led to them being subject to limitations on the use of telemedicine. Specifically, the Medical Board released guidelines stating that physician assistants could not treat a patient via telemedicine without first conducting an in-person examination personally, or with a collaborating physician or other practitioner in the same group practice.

Senate Bill 44 amends the law, aligning with the intent of the Medicaid Reform bill, to clarify that physician assistants can provide telemedicine in the same manner as physicians. Under SB 44, the physician assistant would be subject to the same statutory oversight as physicians regarding the practice of telemedicine, as well as the same disciplinary sanctions when appropriate.

Senate Bill 44 will increase patient access to care, particularly for rural and medically-underserved areas. The bill will allow PAs to use telemedicine, extending the reach of medicine to underserved areas. This is particularly important in Alaska, with vast geographical challenges and limited access to vital healthcare.

Please join me in support of Senate Bill 44.

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