



Representative Ivy Spohnholz

House Health & Social Services Committee Co-Chair

*Serving House District 16: College Gate, Russian Jack, Nunaka Valley, & Reflection Lake
Committee Member: Resources, Energy, & Legislative Budget & Audit*

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 29

Insurance Coverage for Telehealth

“An Act relating to insurance coverage for benefits provided through telehealth; and providing for an effective date.”

HB 29 will enhance access to healthcare services, primarily mental health and primary care, for Alaskans who have insurance plans regulated by the state of Alaska. HB 29 does this by allowing providers who contract with insurers regulated by the state of Alaska to reimburse for services delivered through telehealth. Healthcare services are currently being delivered through telehealth all over the country, and Alaska is at the forefront of providing telehealth services for urban, rural, aging, and the underserved communities across the state, primarily through Medicaid and tribal health care.

Some of the advantages of telehealth include:

- Better access and privacy in rural, remote, and urban areas of Alaska.
- Early intervention which can lead to savings.
- Greater access for referrals to providers who specialize in treating specific health issues.
- Better, and potentially quicker, access means a potential reduction in suicides, domestic violence and other serious events.
- Zero impact on state budget.
- Reduces the need for expensive medical travel.

Under HB 29, telehealth benefits for covered healthcare services, including mental health benefits, will be reimbursable for health care providers licensed in the state without an initial in-person appointment. Depending on the patient’s needs, a telehealth appointment can provide education, reviewing of prescriptions and checking symptoms, all at a distance on a secure system.

Expanding access to healthcare delivered through telehealth will help to address some of Alaska’s unique challenges due to our large geography, rural and aging communities, and statewide addiction epidemic. Telehealth can help Alaska improve access to healthcare, improve clinical outcomes and reduce health care costs.

Session (January-April):
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