



Jan. 28, 2020

Senator David Wilson  
State Capitol Room 115  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: Providence Health & Services Alaska Supports SB 134

Dear Senator Wilson:

Providence Health & Services Alaska is pleased to support Senate Bill 134 MEDICAID COVERAGE OF LIC. COUNSELORS.

Providence has set the standard for modern health care in Alaska for more than 100 years. Today, Providence is the state's leading health care and behavioral health provider and largest private employer with nearly 5,000 caregivers across the state.

Providence Alaska provides outpatient, sub-acute, inpatient and residential behavioral health treatment, primarily on a voluntary basis. We continue to work to integrate behavioral health in primary care settings, and to provide comprehensive and compassionate care to women and children who have experienced trauma from abuse at AlaskaCARES.

As Alaska has faced growing mental health and substance use disorder epidemics, our behavioral health network has strained under the weight. Our existing capacity to treat is outpaced by demand and it is not uncommon to face long wait lists for provider visits. This is exasperated when services are not covered under Medicaid.

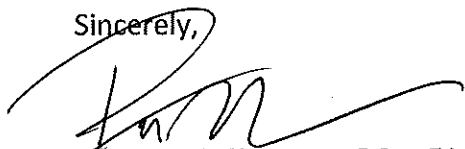
Roughly one-in-three Alaskans depends on Medicaid, which plays an essential role in providing behavioral health services. SB 134 would add professional counseling to the list of services covered by Medicaid, under the Medicaid State Plan.

SB 134 would also allow for counseling services to be provided outside of a clinic environment. This is critical to the ongoing efforts to integrate behavioral health into the primary care and maternal health settings.

SB 134 expands access to behavioral health treatment to more Alaskans, including our most vulnerable friends, family and neighbors. As resources continue to be stretched thin, licensed professional counselors can play an important role in reducing costly emergency room visits, shorter wait times for treatment, and increased capacity in the outpatient setting. This results

in not only better health outcomes, but reduced health care costs and lowers stress placed on an already fragile community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Simmons', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Preston M. Simmons, DSc., FACHE  
Chief Executive, Alaska  
Providence St. Joseph Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renee Rafferty', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Renee Rafferty, MS, LPC  
Director of Behavioral Health Services  
Providence Health & Services Alaska



January 28, 2020

Senator David Wilson  
State Capitol, Room 115  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: SB 134 – Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Counselors

Dear Senator Wilson

The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) is a membership organization representing Alaska's hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and other health care providers. ASHNHA is pleased to write this letter in support of SB 134, an Act relating to medical assistance reimbursement for the services of licensed professional counselors.

ASHNHA supports efforts to improve access to behavioral health services throughout Alaska and to expand the types of providers who can receive reimbursement for caring for Medicaid recipients with behavioral health needs. We believe Medicaid reimbursement for licensed professional counselors places these credentialed clinicians on the same level as other clinicians, and provides a valuable step for addressing the unmet needs of Alaskans and our workforce.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. Please let us know how we can further assist your office in advancing this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Jared Kosin, JD, MBA  
President & CEO



3100 Channel Dr., Suite 300  
Juneau, AK 99801

February 14, 2020

The Honorable David Wilson  
State Senate  
Alaska State Capital  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

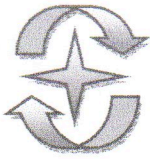
Dear Senator Wilson,

This letter is in support of Senate Bill 134, entitled "An Act relating to medical assistance reimbursement for the services of licensed professional counselors."

There is a significant need for behavioral health services. The state of Alaska experiences high rates of suicide, substance use disorder, and mental health issues stemming from adverse childhood experiences. Limited access to basic behavioral health treatment has led to a crisis-driven system and the state paying for therapeutic interventions at the highest level and cost of care. An effective system allows for entry into services through many different doors. Current Medicaid regulations present a barrier to services. Senate Bill 134 opens access to therapeutic care by allowing licensed professional counselors to bill and serve some of Alaska's most needy populations.

Sincerely,

Charles Clement  
President and Chief Executive Officer



True North Counseling & Consultation, LLC

Hallingstad-Peratrovich bldg., 15 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 212/212a

PO Box 2155, Petersburg, AK 99833

Local: 907-650-7292; Lea direct: 406-560-5683; Jeigh direct: 406-202-0576

email: [lea@foundtruenorth.com](mailto:lea@foundtruenorth.com); [jeigh@foundtruenorth.com](mailto:jeigh@foundtruenorth.com)

[www.foundtruenorth.com](http://www.foundtruenorth.com)

Alaska State Legislature and Governor Dunleavy:

My name is Jeigh Stanton Gregor and I am writing regarding Senate Bill 134 that Senator Wilson has brought forward. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor (License #817) who has a private practice in Petersburg, Alaska. I am excited SB 134 is before you and hopeful it will pass. SB 134 will allow the most vulnerable in our population to have the same access to high quality mental health services as people with private insurance or the ability to pay out of pocket. I feel confident that in our town of 3000 a private practice could thrive seeing only Medicaid clients (it would not impact our practice much as we generally have a 4-6 week waiting period for new clients). The passage of SB 134 will most certainly lead to reductions in costly emergency room visits and acute mental health crisis because preventative care is highly effective in mitigating mental health emergencies.

In short, if SB 134 passes, it will be one of the rare times the State of Alaska will save lots of money on mental health care for our most vulnerable while also drastically improving the mental health care for this same population. It is truly a "win/win" situation.

Thank you for your consideration and, as my email and phone number are attached, feel free to contact me with any questions or thoughts you may have.

Sincerely,

Jeigh Stanton Gregor, LPC



***Discovery Cove Recovery and Wellness Center, LLC***  
**Eagle River / Kodiak**  
P.O. Box 771777  
Eagle River, AK 99577  
(907) 694-5550 \* FAX (907) 694-5570

2/20/20

Senator Wilson  
Chair: Senate Health and Social Services Committee  
Email: [shss@akleg.gov](mailto:shss@akleg.gov)

REGARDING: SB 134

To Chair: Senator Wilson

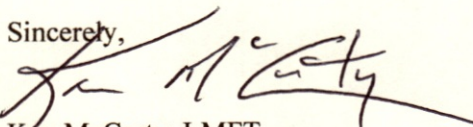
I am writing on behalf of support for SB 134 in that of recognizing Licensed Professional Counselors in language under Title 47.

I am the Executive Director / Owner of Discovery Cove Recovery and Wellness Center; former president of the Alaska Association of Marital and Family Therapists; former board member of the Alaska Professional Licensing Board of Marital Family Therapists; former secretary of the Alaska Collaborative of Telemedicine and Teletherapy; and current Trustee of the Alaska Mental Health Trust.

The State of Alaska is challenged with having enough mental health providers to effectively serve Alaskans. The depletion of providers in Title 47 brings depletion of services, lack of First Response Level Interventions, and an increase in more intrusive intervention (e.g. E.R. visits, A.P.I., etc). The lack of effective service ability also creates unnecessary cognitive stigma with Alaskans, as if they are "beyond help" or "not important to help." In 2018 with the passing of S.B. 105 the State of Alaska recognized the need to include already State Licensed providers (Licensed Marital and Family Therapists) to offer services "In-Lieu-Of". Unfortunately the Licensed Professional Counselors were not included in the SB 105 language. Today the Legislative Body has the opportunity to amend the SB 105 language to recognize another viable professional provider group so that Alaskans can better be served. I implore you to move SB 134 on in your committee to help serve the need that does exist.

Thank you for your time and work.

Sincerely,



Ken McCarty, LMFT  
Executive Director of Discovery Cove



February 21, 2020

Senator David Wilson  
State Capitol, Room 115  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: SB 134 – Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Counselors

Dear Senator Wilson:

Alaska Regional Hospital offers this letter in support of Senate Bill 134, an act relating to medical assistance reimbursement for the services of licensed professional counselors.

For too long, available and appropriate services have not kept pace with the growing and changing behavioral health needs of Alaskans. At Alaska Regional Hospital, we see the impact. Our friends, families, and neighbors present in the emergency department when their challenges rise to a crisis. Our team cares for these patients *as we would our most cherished loved one*. However, we also know the emergency department is not the right location for this type of ongoing care.

The State of Alaska has made great strides toward addressing our state's behavioral health crisis. The 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver will expand access and offer new community based services as it rolls out across communities. The waiver seeks to address the behavioral health needs of Alaskans before their situations rise to the level of crisis.

Approximately 1 in 3 Alaskans receive their health care via Alaska's Medicaid program. SB134 expands access to behavioral health services by adding new services and provider types to the Medicaid program. SB134 also helps with the important step of integrating behavioral health services into the primary care setting by allowing counseling services to be provided outside of a clinic environment.

Thank you for introduction of SB134 and your continued efforts to expand access to needed behavioral health services.

Sincerely,

Julie Taylor  
CEO

February 21, 2020

Senator David Wilson  
State Capitol Room 115  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: SB 134 – Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Counselors

Dear Senator Wilson:

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) supports SB 134. This bill, which adds licensed professional counselors to the list of Medicaid eligible providers, will increase access to needed behavioral health services in our communities.

The Trust exists specifically to improve the lives and outcomes of our beneficiaries, who include Alaskans that experience mental illness, substance use disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and traumatic brain injuries. In partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services, the Trust ensures Alaska has a comprehensive and integrated system of care to provide the necessary services and supports for beneficiaries in their community of choice, and in the least restrictive setting possible.

This legislation will create a more equitable distribution of health professionals in Alaska, expand options for behavioral health treatment and care, decrease the wait times experienced by many who are seeking behavioral health services, and prioritize helping our most vulnerable beneficiaries.

The Trust is eager to support this measure that will increase access to needed behavioral health care services in Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael K. Abbott", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael K. Abbott  
Chief Executive Officer





950 East Bogard Road, Suite 218 • Wasilla, AK 99654  
Phone: (907) 352-2863 • Fax (907) 352-2865  
[www.matsuhealthfoundation.org](http://www.matsuhealthfoundation.org)

February 21, 2020

Senator David Wilson  
Alaska State Legislature  
120 4<sup>th</sup> Street, State Capitol Room 115  
Juneau, AK. 99801

Dear Senator Wilson,

Please accept this letter of support from the Mat-Su Health Foundation for SB 134 “An act relating to medical assistance reimbursement for the services of licensed professional counselors and providing for an effective date.” Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) is the official business name of Valley Hospital Association, which shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC). MSHF invests its share of the hospital’s profits back into the community through grants, scholarships and systems change work to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su.

Our community is currently experiencing a Behavioral Health (BH) crisis. The prevalence of mental health and substance use problems is increasing and access to care is decreasing due to a lack of providers. The average annual growth rate for visits to the MSRMC ED by patients with a BH diagnosis grew 20% from 2015 to 2017 due to the opioid epidemic and lack of outpatient treatment access. Additionally, from 2014 to 2017, the number of BH assessments required for patients in crisis in our ED grew from 349 to more than 1,000. By allowing Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) to bill Medicaid, SB134 will help more people receive care upstream in lower cost settings than emergency departments. If we can intervene early with a system where all people access behavioral health services in a more timely way, we will prevent pain and suffering and will save money. A BH visit for a Medicaid patient costs about \$75, while an average charge for a BH ED visit is \$4,370. Even if a person needed ten counseling session in a year the total cost would be only \$750 – a savings of \$3,600 for just one patient.

In the 2013 Mat-Su Community Health Needs Assessment, Mat-Su residents told us the top five health issues were all related to BH. Mat-Su citizens want an improved and coordinated system of care that makes treatment for BH more readily accessible. Thousands of Alaskans of all ages – children, families, and older Alaskans - are struggling with BH concerns. Yet, there are not enough providers and payor sources to meet this demand for BH care. This legislation helps address these issues.

MSHF is actively doing its part to build a complete BH continuum of care that’s fully staffed with caring professionals who provide the highest quality evidence-based services and treatment. We funded additional BH professionals where the State’s SHARP loan repayment program fell short on dollars and have made grants to fill gaps in the BH continuum of care. We are also financing a High Utilizer Mat-Su (HUMS) project and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) to case manage high need patients circulating through the MSRMC ED and through provider offices across the borough to ensure these patients are accessing care upstream and preventing costly ED visits. In its first year, the HUMS program reduced ED utilization for 34 patients by 62%, saving \$1.1 million in ED costs and, more importantly, making community health services more responsive to our residents’ needs. The savings will be even greater when systems change such as this legislation allow for increased access to care before small problems turn into a crisis.

MSHF and its Board of Directors are in strong support of SB 134 and hope to see it become law soon so that vital BH services become more available to Mat-Su residents who receive their health coverage through Medicaid.

Sincerely,

Chief Executive Officer