



March 23, 2020

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senate President
State Capitol Room 111
Juneau AK, 99801

Re: SB 241

Dear Senator Giessel,

The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) represents more than 65 hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare organizations who employ over 10,000 Alaskans. Its membership spans geographically from PeaceHealth Ketchikan Medical Center to Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital in Utqiagvik.

We strongly support SB 241 and believe there is a legitimate need to extend the Governor's declaration of a public health disaster emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASHNHA's hospitals and nursing homes are on the frontlines of this crisis, and ASHNHA has been working side-by-side with the State of Alaska. ASHNHA staff are working on the State's emergency operations center, ASHNHA is leading situational calls 3 days a week with all our facilities, key physicians, practice managers, and public officials from all levels of government, among other things.

I highlight all this work to demonstrate that we have a reasonable sense of where Alaska stands in the COVID-19 fight, and what resources may be necessary going forward. SB 241 is a practical and necessary step that the legislature should take during these uncertain times.

While ASHNHA strongly supports this legislation, we do wish to offer comment on a few provisions. We believe the flexibility afforded to professional licensing in section 6 will be extremely beneficial for supporting workforce needs. Similarly, the lifting of certain restrictions in section 7 for telehealth services is critical for increasing and maintaining health care capacity during the COVID-19 event.

Please consider revising section 7 to not exclude visits that include controlled substances. If this restriction is necessary, then consider exempting cases where the patient is in a hospital, long-term acute care hospital, or a long-term care facility. We simply do not want doctors to physically see patients in these facilities to prescribe unless it is absolutely necessary.

Finally, we recommend striking the following provision in section 7: "unless the health care provider has a preexisting provider-patient relationship with a patient that is unrelated to COVID-19, the health care services provided are limited to services related to screening for, diagnosing, or treating COVID-19." The whole point of using telehealth is to increase and

maintain capacity. Limiting telehealth to COVID-19 patients absent a prior relationship is an unnecessary restriction that could limit capacity during major disruptions to the health care system.

ASHNHA strongly supports SB 241. Thank you for your leadership on this issue. Please let us know how we can further assist in advancing this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Kosin".

Jared C. Kosin, JD, MBA
President & CEO