National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

Chairman Wilson & Vice-Chairwoman Hughes
Senate Health & Social Services Committee
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chairwoman Hughes, and Health & Social Services Committee members,

On behalf of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony for SB78 A, An Act Relating to Telehealth to the Senate Health & Social Services Committee. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity, and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, and there is currently no cure. Nearly one million people are living with MS in the United States, according to a study funded by the National MS Society.

The Society believes that people living with MS should have access to a comprehensive network of providers and healthcare services focused on producing the best outcomes at affordable costs. Telemedicine, including audio-only services, is instrumental in achieving that goal because it broadens the number of providers that people living with MS have access to while making it easier and less costly to reach those providers for routine consultations. Telemedicine offers individuals and families access to health care services from the safety of their own home. The need for continued access to telemedicine beyond the current public health crisis is crucial. For many people living with MS, getting out of the house is not easy and they may face physical barriers to care. They use mobility devices and may rely on public transportation or disability services to reach appointments. These options are often unreliable and lead to patients missing their time slots. Allowing virtual appointments means that those living with MS and other chronic, disabling conditions can access the care they need when they need it.

Thank you for consideration of supporting SB78. Please contact Director of Advocacy & Policy Jennifer Muthig at jennifer.muthig@nmss.org or Alaskan District Activist Leader & MS Activist Doug Toelle at doug@toelle.com if you have questions or would like additional information.

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cc: Senator Costello, Senator Reinbold & Senator Begich