



ELECTRONIC MAIL

March 5, 2021

House Health & Social Services Committee
State Capitol Room
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: ASHNHA Strongly Supports HB 76

Dear Committee Members,

The Alaska State Hospital & Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) strongly supports HB 76. Leading up to February 14, ASHNHA was on record with warnings about the impact that could result if Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration expired. Unfortunately, many of those warnings have come true:

- Alaska's health care system and local governments are still in compliance limbo
- Airport testing has declined
- There is a substantial outbreak in Petersburg, Alaska
- The \$8 million in monthly federal food assistance will be forfeited by April; and
- Out-of-state telehealth providers have discontinued care

Given the extensiveness of ASHNHA's efforts to continue Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration in the public record, I will forgo restating the many concerns and nuances of the declaration as it relates to the ability of Alaska's hospitals and nursing homes to operate in the pandemic. Rather, I will briefly update committee members on the compliance limbo that we continue to navigate.

As described in the past, there have been numerous compliance questions coming from Alaska's hospitals and nursing homes concerning authority to use federal blanket waivers for operational flexibilities without a state emergency declaration in place. Without reliable guidance available from any source, ASHNHA has been forced to appeal directly to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for formal direction.

Accordingly, ASHNHA sent CMS a letter on February 19, and followed this letter with a meeting on February 23. At that meeting, CMS and our State partners were very supportive, and all indications suggest the blanket waivers remain in effect. However, it is now approaching two weeks later, and we still do not have a formal response back from CMS.

In a highly regulated industry such as health care, documentation is crucial, so until a formal

decision is made and transmitted in writing, compliance remains an open question, and frankly, confusing.

The simplest way to remove compliance doubt, secure federal assistance, allow access to out-of-state telehealth, and maximize our geographic advantage with airport testing is passing HB 76. There is absolutely no downside to reinstating the emergency declaration, and while the benefits may not be readily obvious to many in everyday life, those benefits very much are for Alaska's hospitals, nursing homes, and health care heroes who have been on the frontlines in Alaskans' greatest time of need. Please support HB 76.

Thank you for your attention on this matter, and your partnership in solving this and the many other health care challenges facing Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Jared C. Kosin, J.D., M.B.A.
President & CEO