



Feb. 2, 2021

Senator David Wilson
Chair, Senate Health & Social Services Committee
State Capitol Room 121
Juneau AK, 99801

Re: Providence Supports SB 56

Dear Senator Wilson:

As CEO of Providence Health & Services Alaska, I am writing in strong support of the extension of the Alaska Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration, as authorized by SB 56.

Roughly one year ago, the first COVID-19 patient in the United States was treated at a Providence hospital in Washington. Providence caregivers have worked tirelessly to care for our families, friends, neighbors, and communities during this once-in-a-generation pandemic. I am humbled by the countless stories of amazing sacrifice, compassion, and heroism displayed by our caregivers and in our community this year. As we see promising rates of vaccinations in Alaska, we can finally look toward positive days ahead. However, we cannot lose sight of the policies that will take us there.

The COVID-19 response has required the health care community to act nimbly and creatively while delivering care and protecting our most vulnerable patients. The state and federal government acted swiftly during the beginning months of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide hospitals and the health care community with tools necessary to deliver care and protect public health. This partnership continues to save lives.

The state's Public Health Emergency Disaster Declaration is the foundation for the framework that allows hospitals and providers to partner with the state and federal government to access waivers, flexibilities, and disaster relief. Some examples of partnerships that are made possible because of the state emergency declaration include¹:

- Waiving physical premises and other site-specific requirements, allowing hospitals to partner on off-site COVID-19 testing and alternative care sites.
- Requiring state-regulated insurers to waive cost shares and onerous prior authorizations for COVID-19 testing and treatment.
- Monitoring COVID-19 patients safely from their homes, thereby augmenting critical capacity, reducing additional potential exposures, and the need for hospitalizations.
- Providing telehealth for vulnerable Medicare patients without a prior physical examination.

¹ These examples are not included directly in the State Disaster Public Health Emergency Declaration but are made possible because of the declaration.

- Expediting the professional licensure and renewal process, allowing physicians and nurses to work across state lines, providing relief during times of critical workforce shortages.
- Allowing businesses to manufacture and distribute PPE and the ability for hospitals to safely sanitize existing supplies during times of extreme shortages.
- Allowing Alaskans with existing serious health conditions to maintain their out-of-state provider relationships through phone and telehealth, while travel restrictions make in-person visits impossible.
- Increased federal aid, including the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) and CARES Act funding.

The pandemic has brought dual health and economic impacts and many Alaskans are also financially struggling. This is evident by the increased demand on social service organizations that provide to those in need. Without a state disaster declaration in place, many of these organizations will not be able to access critical federal funding for food and housing insecurity. We have been monitoring a similar discussion in Wisconsin, whose legislative budget office estimated a monthly loss of \$49 million in federal food aid without a state disaster declaration.

We appreciate Governor Dunleavy for introducing SB 56 and we thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. It has been a long year with many sacrifices, and we can't falter in our response and resolve now. Please pass SB 56 as soon as possible, allowing all of us to continue caring for Alaskans in partnership and with the best tools available.

Sincerely,

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

Preston M. Simmons, DSc. FACHE
Chief Executive
Providence Health & Services Alaska