

Jody Simpson

From: Suzan Bast [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 9:54 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Support Alaska's emergency declaration to allow federal flexibilities to meet patient needs

Dear Senate Committee,

I am writing today to urge your full and quick support for SB 56 to extend Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration. Without an emergency declaration in place, we risk losing support from the national guard on testing and vaccine, flexibilities for COVID units in hospitals, and the ability to use telehealth and virtual medical visits.

The emergency declaration has nothing to do with mask mandates, hunker downs, school schedules, or restaurant closures. These are all matters of local control, and they will continue with or without the declaration.

Alaska is doing much better in the battle against COVID, but we are not past this yet. We are still busy taking care of COVID patients and caring for Alaskans' delayed health care needs while mounting an intensive vaccine campaign. Please support SB 56 and extend the emergency declaration so we can continue to work together to get through this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Suzan Bast

[REDACTED]
Fairbanks, AK 99709
[REDACTED]

Jody Simpson

From: Betsy Roberts [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 10:29 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Vote YES on SB56

Vote YES on SB56

Jody Simpson

From: Stephanie Kesler [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 10:29 AM
To: Sen. Tom Begich; Rep. Zack Fields
Cc: Sen. Lora Reinbold; Sen. Mia Costello; Sen. Shelley Hughes; Sen. David Wilson
Subject: In Support of SB56

Dear Senator Begich and Representative Fields,

I am a constituent writing to urge support of the extension of the state's Public Health Emergency Disaster Declaration. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the deep connection between our state's economic and public health. Allowing the emergency declaration to expire will have strong consequences to health care workers, hospitals, and the most vulnerable Alaskans.

I serve on the Providence Alaska Region Board and I am deeply concerned about the conversation surrounding the extension of the emergency declaration. Simply put, the emergency declaration allows hospitals and providers to adjust to community need. Instead of screening symptomatic patients in common areas, hospitals can create COVID-19 triage areas, thereby keeping non-COVID patients and caregivers safer. Home monitoring programs have been stood up, allowing COVID-19 patients to be treated safely at home. This improves health outcomes while not overrunning hospital capacity. Local governments can access emergency aid and social service organizations can receive funding to assist Alaskans facing economic hardships.

In particular the ability to enable wide-spread adoption of Telehealth has *literally* saved lives. Also the licensing and fingerprinting flexibility has maintained appropriate security and review while at the same time allowing for timely and efficient staffing to address the huge challenges wrought by Covid.

Creating a piecemeal of legislative solutions will only cost us time and introduce more instability to an already stressed environment.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge the extension of Alaska's Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration.

Sincerely,
Stephanie A Kesler, Vice President Providence Alaska Region Board

Cc: Members of the Senate Health & Social Services Committee

Steph

February 8, 2021

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

Re: Alaska Regional Hospital Supports SB 56

Dear Senator Wilson:

As Interim CEO of Alaska Regional Hospital, I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 56, the extension of Alaska's Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration in response to COVID-19 (Declaration).

On March 11, 2020, a patient presented to the emergency department at Alaska Regional Hospital with symptoms of the coronavirus. This patient was Alaska's first COVID-19 positive patient. Our team of frontline health care workers were ready then, and we are ready now to care for COVID-19 patients. The Declaration and corresponding access to waivers offered by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), are vital to patient care and employee safety during the pandemic.

During emergencies such as the pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is authorized to issue waivers from Medicare, Medicaid, or CHIP requirements to help beneficiaries maintain access to care. "Blanket Waivers" are issued for an emergency area when CMS makes the determination that providers would be better able to provide residents needed health care with flexibilities and/or waiver of requirements.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CMS issued approximately 125 "Blanket Waivers" to better position providers to respond to the needs of patients. In this package, 20 specific waiver flexibilities may only be implemented if " ... *not inconsistent with a state's emergency preparedness or pandemic plan.*"¹ If the declaration expires we are concerned health care providers in Alaska may no longer be able to access these flexibilities. Without a disaster declaration, there is no emergency plan in place by which to measure consistent with the CMS blanket waivers.

Alaska Regional Hospital is consulting with our legal team to understand how our patients, staff, and services would be impacted if the Declaration expires. Our initial findings conclude the following:

- Closure of our COVID Unit. The build-out of our COVID Unit was completed on an expedited timeframe to meet the health care needs of Alaskans who contracted COVID-19 while reducing exposure risks for front line health workers. Some elements of the COVID Unit may not meet code for the physical environment of care.
- Loss of the waiver which allows hospitals to partner on off-site COVID-19 testing and alternative care sites, such as the Alaska Airlines Center.

¹ <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/summary-covid-19-emergency-declaration-waivers.pdf>

- No waiver of provisions of the federal Emergency Medical Treatment & Labor Act (EMTALA) that allowed Alaska Regional Hospital to set up a isolated triage area for patients presenting to the Emergency Department with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Waiver of requirements under 24 CFR §482 to allow use of practitioners to the fullest extent possible, placing limitations on practitioners and the health care workforce
- Ends the expedited professional licensure and renewal process

SB 56 contains key provisions that provide flexibilities for professional and occupational licensing (Section 5), telemedicine and telehealth (Section 6), and fingerprinting (Section 7). These state flexibilities are key for Alaska Regional Hospital to respond to staffing needs. Without these flexibilities, state processes will delay our ability to increase staffing levels and bring on new provider types quickly if we experience a patient surge or to respond to staff burnout due to the ongoing pandemic.

If the Committee considers vehicles other than extension of the Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration to provide relief from state processes, we encourage careful consideration of the time needed for enabling legislation and/or regulations to take effect in relation to the expiration date of the current Declaration. We also encourage the State of Alaska request written confirmation from CMS on the ability for health care facilities in Alaska to access the flexibilities offered under the blanket waivers without a Declaration. Ensuring we are operating within the scope of our license is critical. We need clarification from CMS in order to continue some of the services and programs we have instituted in response to the pandemic.

The number of COVID-19 cases reported each day has been going down and Alaska's vaccine distribution rate is one of the best in the country. We are making progress! It is not the time to drop our guard. We need to have all tools available to continue our progress. Ensuring residents, business owners, and local jurisdictions are eligible for federal programs designed to keep people working and businesses open is crucial for Alaska's short- and long-term economic recovery. We simply do not know what's next with the virus or in terms of help from the federal government. Alaska's economy has been hit hard. We need to make sure local businesses have access to all possible programs and resources so they can stay open.

Senate Bill 56 is critical for Alaska's health care system. It has been a long battle for nurses, food services workers, respiratory therapists, social workers, CNA's, facilities crews, doctors, radiology techs, phlebotomists, and other front-line health care workers. While we are making progress in Alaska, we are still battling a global pandemic. We need every tool and flexibility to continue safely caring for patients and protecting the health and wellbeing of our staff and physicians. Thank you for your careful consideration of this legislation.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Opsut
Interim CEO

Jody Simpson

From: Micaiah Liebhaber [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:26 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Support Alaska's emergency declaration to allow federal flexibilities to meet patient needs

Dear Senate Committee,

Please help keep our vaccination clinics open and support our healthcare workers by extending the emergency declaration!

I am writing today to urge your full and quick support for SB 56 to extend Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration. Without an emergency declaration in place, we risk losing support from the national guard on testing and vaccine, flexibilities for COVID units in hospitals, and the ability to use telehealth and virtual medical visits.

The emergency declaration has nothing to do with mask mandates, hunker downs, school schedules, or restaurant closures. These are all matters of local control, and they will continue with or without the declaration.

Alaska is doing much better in the battle against COVID, but we are not past this yet. We are still busy taking care of COVID patients and caring for Alaskans' delayed health care needs while mounting an intensive vaccine campaign. Please support SB 56 and extend the emergency declaration so we can continue to work together to get through this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Micaiah Liebhaber
[REDACTED]
Fairbanks, AK 99709
[REDACTED]

Jody Simpson

From: Robert Tuckness [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:26 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

As limited as medical resources are here in the interior this emergency declaration is essential for the proper treatment of our patients. Support during vaccination drives and for prompt testing is essential in combatting the COVID 19 virus.

It is critical that you support Senate Bill 56 to extend the public health disaster emergency declaration. The public health emergency declaration has allowed Alaska to take critical steps during the pandemic to remove barriers that impede rapid responses in health care and other areas. It has allowed Alaska to access federal financial resources, utilize the National Guard, and tap into testing supplies and critical equipment.

Eliminating the emergency declaration could mean:

- vaccine availability and administration are jeopardized;
- hospitals lose access to critical supplies and flexibilities;
- No National Guard for testing, vaccine distribution, and other support

The declaration is about much more than public health orders, it is about accessing important resources that support our health care system and our businesses. Now is not the time to turn back the clock and cut off critical resources.

Sincerely,

Robert Tuckness
[REDACTED]

Fairbanks, AK 99709
[REDACTED]

Jody Simpson

From: Grayson Westfall [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:26 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

I am a physician at Tanana Valley Clinic in Fairbanks. Without the emergency declaration, the State would not have been able to stem the tide of Covid as well as they did. The State did a pretty good job, and without the declaration, all gains will be reversed.

It is critical that you support Senate Bill 56 to extend the public health disaster emergency declaration. The public health emergency declaration has allowed Alaska to take critical steps during the pandemic to remove barriers that impede rapid responses in health care and other areas. It has allowed Alaska to access federal financial resources, utilize the National Guard, and tap into testing supplies and critical equipment.

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Sincerely,

Grayson Westfall
[REDACTED]

Fairbanks, AK 99712
[REDACTED]

Jody Simpson

From: Paige Klem [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:27 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

Please help keep our community on track to get through Covid safely!

It is critical that you support Senate Bill 56 to extend the public health disaster emergency declaration. The public health emergency declaration has allowed Alaska to take critical steps during the pandemic to remove barriers that impede rapid responses in health care and other areas. It has allowed Alaska to access federal financial resources, utilize the National Guard, and tap into testing supplies and critical equipment.

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- No National Guard for testing, vaccine distribution, and other support

The declaration is about much more than public health orders, it is about accessing important resources that support our health care system and our businesses. Now is not the time to turn back the clock and cut off critical resources.

Sincerely,

Paige Klem
[REDACTED]
Anchorage, AK 99516
[REDACTED]

Jody Simpson

From: Nathan Dahl <nathan@maplespringsliving.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:28 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

The COVID pandemic has been very stressful and harmful not just for the overall health of our state. As an Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing Administrator the pandemic has been devastating. Our residents have been under extraordinary pressure and stress. Our staff have worked under difficult and dangerous conditions including overtime and extensive infection control protocols. I understand the public cry for the pandemic to stop but, is this the time to undo all of this hard work? Why did we go through it if we are going to limit the ability of our buildings to safely care for our resident. Stopping the Emergency Declaration nullify many of the the things that help us to be successful including more flexible regulations, and a focus on the health of our seniors. Please do not make it more difficult than it already has been for us to keep our residents safe.

It is critical that you support Senate Bill 56 to extend the public health disaster emergency declaration. The public health emergency declaration has allowed Alaska to take critical steps during the pandemic to remove barriers that impede rapid responses in health care and other areas. It has allowed Alaska to access federal financial resources, utilize the National Guard, and tap into testing supplies and critical equipment.

Eliminating the emergency declaration could mean:

- vaccine availability and administration are jeopardized;
- hospitals lose access to critical supplies and flexibilities;
- No National Guard for testing, vaccine distribution, and other support

The declaration is about much more than public health orders, it is about accessing important resources that support our health care system and our businesses. Now is not the time to turn back the clock and cut off critical resources.

Sincerely,

Nathan Dahl
1941 Driftwood Cir
Palmer, AK 99645
nathan@maplespringsliving.com

Jody Simpson

From: Monique Martin [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:31 AM
To: Senate Health and Social Services
Subject: Please Support SB56

Dear Senate Committee,

Please support SB56 for my coworkers who work on the frontlines of healthcare at Alaska Regional Hospital. While I am ready for some normalcy, we cannot let up in our fight against the pandemic. The mandates in place for residents of the Municipality of Anchorage, and a great source of frustration for many Alaskans, can remain in place, with or without the state's disaster declaration. But, health care facilities will lose access to important flexibilities to care for patients and safeguard employees without extension of the declaration.

We need Alaska's public health disaster emergency declaration, and I urge your full and quick support for SB 56 to extend it. Please remember the health care workers who are taking care of Alaskans 24/7 during the COVID pandemic. They have made daily sacrifices to care for our community. The emergency declaration is necessary for this care to continue.

We continue to have dozens of Alaskans in hospitals and outbreaks in vulnerable populations. We face uncertainty over the impact of a new variant strain coming to Alaska. At the same time, we are mounting an intensive vaccine campaign.

Without an emergency declaration in place, we risk losing support from the national guard on testing and vaccine, flexibilities for COVID units in hospitals, and the ability to use telehealth and virtual medical visits. While we all want life to return to normal, eliminating the declaration will only slow us down. Please support SB 56.

Sincerely,

Monique Martin
[REDACTED]
Anchorage, AK 99507
[REDACTED]