



**The Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities**

P.O.Box 241742  
Anchorage, Alaska 99524-1742

***To facilitate a united provider voice for best practices, advocacy, partnerships and networking.***

February 1, 2021

Senator David Wilson  
Senate Health and Social Services Committee Chair  
P O Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Commissioner Adam Crum  
Department of Health and Social Services  
3601 C Street, Suite 902  
Anchorage, AK 99503

**Re: Public Comments on SB56 Extension of Alaska's Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration**

The Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities (AADD) has worked very closely with the Department of Health and Social Services, in particular with Senior and Disability Services (SDS) and Public Health, to maintain safe supports for vulnerable Alaskans.

The year 2020 delivered many challenges to our state with the COVID-19 pandemic. We all hoped it would be over by now but it's not. We appreciate that through the guidance and leadership of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Alaska has fared better than most other states in the country. We are thankful to Governor Dunleavy for listening to DHSS and leveraging his emergency declaration powers to the extent necessary to respond to the crisis in flattening the curve, allowing local community leaders to determine measures customized to their demographics, and to avoid exceeding hospital capacity. Home and community based service providers have been a critical component to our success in mitigating more devastating effects in Alaska.

Our service providers are working on the frontlines and spiking of cases and deaths in our State increases our concern for the welfare and safety of these Alaskans if the current emergency declaration expires on February 14, 2021 without prompt legislative action. Although vaccination efforts have begun and Alaska leads the nation in per capita vaccinations, it is essential that this momentum is perpetuated into and throughout the summer months to regenerate seasonal

economic activities. Adding emphasis, Trident Seafoods Corp. in Akutan currently has almost 20% of its workforce offline as COVID positive, which also risks the health of the 100 native villagers.

Throughout the past year, our service providers (who were already facing workforce shortages) have endured the additional disruption of up to 15% of their workforce at any time as they quarantined for close contact or awaiting test results. Only the flexibilities available through public health emergency declarations providing alternate service delivery modalities (telehealth, telemedicine), regulatory extensions (professional and occupational licensing), and travel considerations necessary to protect our native communities have enabled our service providers to remain as active partners in our statewide mitigation efforts.

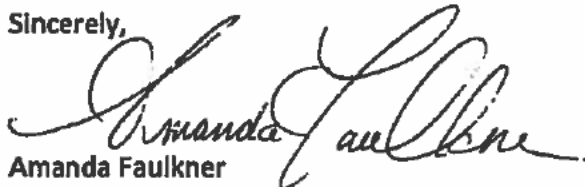
We have been informed by SDS that the Appendix K waivers has been approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Appendix K provisions for the Home and Community Based Services Waivers are critical to maintaining essential supports under pandemic (and pandemic recovery) conditions. Alignment of the Federal and State approval is critical as the "blanket waivers" by CMS and SB241 provisions are renewed or extended throughout 2021. Many of the recipients of these services have been subjected to more restrictive guidelines and requirements than the general public in the past year, and AADD is planning to submit requests to the State of Alaska in within the near future for some flexibilities to become permanent following the pandemic declaration, based the effectiveness and efficiencies of some methods utilized during 2020.

AADD has an active membership of 60 providers serving thousands of vulnerable Alaskans who would overwhelm the limited hospital capacity if the current support strategies cannot be maintained. COVID-19 has already adversely affecting workforce availability so a failure of a timely extension of the Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration will be a significant step backward in our common fight against COVID-19 for our communities.

We believe that this Act is essential for our state to recover its freedoms and economy, weary providers need as much flexibility as possible to adapt to rapidly changing challenges in this pandemic recovery year.

We strongly urge the HSS Committee to unanimously approve SB56 to extend the public health disaster declaration through September 30, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amanda Faulkner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amanda" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Faulkner".

Amanda Faulkner  
AADD President

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Jonathon Marsh <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 1:06 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** For public testimony

I vote a resounding YES to extend Alaska's emergency declaration. We are not out of the woods of Covid and won't be for awhile. We need all the help we can get to vaccinate and treat those at risk along with essential workers like myself. Now is not the time to let up our guard and go backwards with all the work we have done to keep our state safe. Again I ask to please extend the disaster declaration. Thank you.

Jonathon Marsh, Anchorage resident

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Connie Newman [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 1:18 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** Support for Disaster Declaration Extension

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for allowing the Iditarod Areas School District a voice of support for the extension of the Covid - 19 Disaster Declaration.

*Connie A. Newman, Superintendent  
Iditarod Area School District  
Box 90  
McGrath, AK 99627*

[cnewman@iditarodsd.org](mailto:cnewman@iditarodsd.org)

*907-524-1221 Voice  
907-524-3217 Fax*



Together we are: Iditarod Strong

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**Amidst the confusion of the times, the  
conflicts of conscience, in the turmoil of  
daily living, our faith becomes an anchor to  
our lives.**

**Thomas S. Monson - 1927-2018, American Religious Leader**



## Jody Simpson

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**From:** Daniella Ambrosino May <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 1:29 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** For Public Testimony SB56

Senators,

I am a resident of Senate District G, Ms. Reinbold is my senator. I am contacting today to provide public testimony on SB56. Please vote YES on SB56. Ms. Reinbold's extremely dangerous views on the COVID pandemic do not accurately represent the majority of her district. Touting conspiracy theories as evidence is a dangerous practice, and should not be a basis for public welfare policy. We need to extend Alaska's emergency deceleration for the COVID pandemic. Otherwise we will be undoing the steps forward we have taken to try to get society back to normal. We do not have the medical capacity in this state to gamble with people's lives.

Thank you,  
Daniella May  
Eagle River, AK

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Regards,  
Daniella N. Ambrosino May

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Jon Frey <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 2:14 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

When did protecting our citizens and healthcare workers become a political issue? I expect the legislature to get over whatever misinformation they may be consuming and listen to the workers on the front line of this crisis! I am tired of having to fight representatives who should be happy to do what LITTLE they can to help healthcare workers! This is not acceptable. Extending the emergency order is the ABSOLUTE LEAST that you can do for your State. We should NOT be wasting valuable time and debate on something that is so plainly the right thing to do. Take action NOW and stop this stupidity! If you would like to bring yourselves into the hospital and see this struggle first hand, I'm sure we could arrange that. I, however, do not recommend it because it is DANGEROUS. But my coworkers and I have to deal with this DANGER every day! Do your job!

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,

Jon Frey  
[REDACTED]

Anchorage, AK 99516  
[REDACTED]

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Maureen Whitmer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 2:29 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** Emergency declaration allows Alaska access to important resources

Dear Senate Committee,

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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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,

Maureen Whitmer

[REDACTED]  
Bethel, AK 99559  
[REDACTED]



**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Keeley Olson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 2:44 PM  
**To:** Senate Health and Social Services  
**Subject:** Support for SB56

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. I am writing in full support for extending the State's emergency declaration. This declaration makes it easier for state agencies to collaborate around COVID testing, vaccinating and allows the state to access federal funding for COVID mediation.

After listening to several comments, I fear many confuse the emergency declaration with local mandates.

My understanding is that Alaska has been very successful rolling out vaccines and I want to make sure we are primed to continue to do so, without barriers.

Thank you,

Keeley Olson

**February 9, 2021**

**The Honorable David Wilson, Chair  
Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801**

**Dear Senator Wilson,**

**This letter is in support of SB 56, which extends the COVID-19 Public Health Disaster Emergency Declaration until September 30, 2021.**

**APEI is a Joint Insurance Arrangement, formed under AS 21.76, which allows public entities to pool together to share costs and procure insurance on a group basis. We are the non-profit administrator of a pool of about 71 school districts, municipalities, and related organizations located around Alaska. Most of our members and their employees would be affected in some way by this extension.**

**Retaining the disaster declaration has a number of provisions to enable our municipal and school district members to meet the needs of their students and citizens:**

- The flexibility in licensing and expansion of telehealth included in the current and proposed disaster declaration has been very helpful for people in our largely rural communities who need health care, and has enabled them to get at least some of the care they need without the expense and risk to their health inherent in travelling. APEI manages the workers' compensation claims for a large number of injured workers who depend on this type of care for their treatment.**
- The existence of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) declaration has allowed the state and communities more flexibility in distributing and administering vaccines. Making it possible for as many people as possible to be vaccinated is key to allowing life to return to normal and children to school; ending the PHE will impede those efforts.**
- Alaska's school districts received a significant amount of CARES funding from the Federal Government, not all of which has been spent. With these unspent funds, a number of districts face the possibility of having their fund balance exceed statutory limitations. Without an extension of the PHE, the department of Education will not be able to waive that limitation, forcing school districts to either forego the funding, or spend it quickly before the deadline, without time for careful consideration of needs and expenses.**
- The flexibility in procurement for COVID-19 related expenditures has been a significant benefit to our members, and allowed them purchase supplies and contract for services quickly, without the delays inherent in the typical procurement process. This has been invaluable to our members and allowed them to respond to needs in their communities.**

**This disaster declaration is permissive rather than directive, and can provide the foundation that municipalities and school districts need to best respond to the changing needs of their community members. I urge you to support this bill to enable our state to continue to protect Alaskans.**

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Thurston".

**Barbara Thurston  
Executive Director  
Alaska Public Entity Insurance  
(907)-523-9440 Direct phone**

To the members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

My name is Collin Atkinson and I am a physical therapist who works with the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. I am writing you today in regards to the proposal by Gov. Mike Dunleavy to extend Alaska's COVID-19 emergency past February 14.

As a healthcare provider, who works predominantly with the aging individual, I have been able to witness how this disease does not affect individuals equally. The most vulnerable members of our communities are the ones who share a disproportionate burden of this disease. Beyond mortality, the effects of COVID-19 are wide reaching and significant.

The emergency order in question provides a cohesive message to the members of the Alaskan community that we are not done fighting this disease as a team. The virus does not play politics, and eliminating safeguards too expediently will effect more than the health of our state. Failure to control the virus during the remaining months of the winter and spring will have an impact on our economy ability to operate as a state this coming summer tourism season.

Yes, it is undeniable that required COVID testing for traveling, continued masking, and implementation of social distancing requirements are burdensome. But these strategies are what remain necessary to prevent fighting from behind. This order provides the foundation for the medical workforce to have success. Just because we have fared well relative to the world in terms of our mortality burden thus far, does not mean that we will continue to have success if new variants of COVID-19 take hold within our state. We are having success with vaccination, but we still have a long way to go before anything truly changes in terms of herd immunity. Believing that we are any more protected from COVID-19 at this time relative to this last November and December is wishful thinking and cognitive dissonance from the facts. Battling this virus is a marathon, one that is progressing into its 11 month. Abandoning this cohesive strategy to play politics is a disservice to your constituents and the state of Alaska.

We are lucky to have had some exceptional leadership by healthcare providers such as Dr. Anne Zink and an administration that has listened to the scientists in our community. Please continue to listen to the physicians, and place the health and wellbeing of your constituents, family members, and the states elders before the politics of corporations who have failed to pivot.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CAK, PT'.

Collin Atkinson, PT, DPT

## Jody Simpson

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**From:** Carol Juergens <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 9:58 PM  
**To:** Sen. Gary Stevens; Rep. Louise Stutes  
**Cc:** Sen. David Wilson; Sen. Shelley Hughes; Sen. Mia Costello; Sen. Lora Reinbold; Sen. Tom Begich  
**Subject:** SB 56

Dear Senator Gary Stevens and Representative Louise Stutes:

Hello to you both. I am writing as a member of the Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center Community Advisory Council to urge your support of the extension of the state's Public Health Emergency Disaster Declaration. Allowing the emergency declaration to expire will have strong adverse consequences for health care workers, hospitals, and the most vulnerable Alaskans.

It appears that the conversation surrounding the extension of the emergency declaration has been missing the point and focusing on public health mandates and business closures—not on the fact that the emergency declaration allows hospitals and providers extra flexibility in adjusting to community needs during the pandemic. 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 can be created to allow COVID-19 patients to be treated safely at home, improving 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.

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

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

Hope this finds you well!

Sincerely,

Carol Juergens, MD  
[REDACTED]

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** Luann McVey [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 10:33 PM  
**To:** Sen. David Wilson; Sen. Mia Costello; Sen. Lora Reinbold; Sen. Shelley Hughes  
**Cc:** Sen. Tom Begich; Rep. Sara Hannan; Rep. Andi Story; Sen. Jesse Kiehl  
**Subject:** Extending the COVID public health disaster emergency declaration

Honorable Alaskan Lawmakers,

I'm writing to urge you to extend the COVID public health disaster emergency declaration to September 30, 2021 so that State efforts to fight COVID-19, such as testing, contract tracing, purchase of medical supplies, and vaccination efforts can all continue. The health of all Alaskans is at stake. Pass **SB56**.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Luann McVey  
Retired Alaskan teacher  
[REDACTED]  
Douglas, Alaska. 99824

**Jody Simpson**

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 09, 2021 11:02 PM  
**To:** Sen. Peter Micciche  
**Cc:** Sen. Tom Begich; Sen. Shelley Hughes  
**Subject:** Emergency Declaration ~ What Alaskans Think

Hello Senators, I have recently read comments made by Republican senators and published in AP reporting alleging that Alaskans desire an end to the emergency declaration. I would like to respectfully counter your assessment and report that as an Alaskan, I and many others do NOT want this emergency declaration to end. We need the relatively seamless execution of the vaccination efforts to keep moving forward. Please do what you can to push the declaration through September at which point the state can reassess its needs. Thank you.

Raniyah Bakr  
Skagway, AK