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February 10, 2021

Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Wasilla
Alaska State Senate

Re: Senate Bill 56 to Extend the Public Health Emergency Declaration Order

Dear Senator

The Sunshine Community Health Center, A Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Board of Directors strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 56 for its swift passage to extend the COVID public health disaster emergency declaration order. Extending this order will allow the continuation of vital administrative, regulatory and statutory flexibilities that have allowed Alaska to positively respond to the COVID 19 emergency.

The high rate of COVID 19 cases have had a huge impact on FQHC's in the services they provide and the patients they serve. Alaska's 28 FQHC's serve over 115,000 patients with a wide variety of health conditions. The majority of the patients served already face financial, transportation, language or cultural issues. Over half of the patients are of ethnic minorities and a high percentage are low income.

Your swift action to pass SB 56 and extend the public health emergency will allow Alaskans to receive future relief funds as we work together to address the pandemic and rebuild our economy.

Alaska FQHC's have been on the front lines of the pandemic emergency response. They provide COVID testing, vaccinations, telehealth services and contact tracing.

The pandemic and economic recession has taken a financial toll on FQHC's at a time when they are the face and frontline of health care in their community. SB 56 and the Public Health Emergency extension will continue to provide a critical avenue for health care providers and their patients.

Alaska's Community Health Centers remain committed and ready to continue their partnership with the State of Alaska. We respectfully ask for your support of SB 56.

Respectfully,
Kathy Watkins

Kathy Watkins
Board Chair



www.sunshineclinic.org

Sunshine Community Health Center