

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator David Wilson

Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 175 v. I

"An Act relating to telehealth; relating to the practice of medicine; relating to medical assistance coverage for services provided by telehealth; and providing for an effective date."

The COVID-19 pandemic relaxed Alaska's telehealth laws which enabled broader access to behavioral health and specialty care, created cost-savings from reduced travel, and increased the convenience of high-quality health care to patients across the state. However, Alaskans have faced barriers to telehealth appointments due to regulatory hurdles across professions and inconsistent Medicaid coverage for services delivered via telehealth. COVID-19 related flexibilities were regulatory suspensions and not permanent.

SB 175 maintains pandemic-related telehealth flexibilities and expands Alaska Medicaid coverage of telehealth services. SB 175:

- 1) Creates a new section on telehealth for health care providers licensed with the State of Alaska that removes the requirement for an in-person visit and ensures payment parity for a telehealth visit.
- 2) Allows physicians licensed in another state to deliver telehealth services within their scope of practice if there is an established physician-patient relationship, the non-resident physician has given the patient an in-person physical exam, and the services are related to ongoing treatment or follow-up care related to past treatment.
- 3) Ensures telehealth availability for services related to opioid use disorder and controlled substances for certain providers.
- 4) Increases telehealth access for Alaska Medicaid beneficiaries by ensuring coverage for services for behavioral health, home and community-based services, rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers, and other programs eligible for Alaska Medicaid reimbursement. Ensures payment parity and Medicaid coverage for virtually any telehealth modality (e.g., appointments over the Internet, phone, email, etc.).
- 5) Does not require anyone to deliver or receive services through telehealth. Both the provider and the patient may choose to limit or decline a telehealth encounter.

Comprehensive telehealth delivery has revolutionized health care in Alaska by creating another tool for providers to care for patients when they cannot physically be together. SB 175 will continue to modernize the state's health care system to the benefit of all Alaskans. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. Please contact my staff, Jasmin Martin at 465-8165 or at Jasmin.Martin@akleg.gov with any questions.