

Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Center of Alaska, LLC.

April 19, 2022

The Honorable Mia Costello
Alaska State Senate
Alaska State Capitol Building Room 119
Juneau, Alaska 99801

The Honorable David Wilson
Alaska State Senate
Alaska State Capitol Building Room 121
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Submitted via email: Senate.Labor.and.Commerce@akleg.gov

RE: SB175 "An Act relating to telehealth...":

Dear Senator Costello and Committee members:

I am a physician in private practice in Anchorage specializing in allergy, asthma, and immunology and the medical director of the largest Allergy/Immunology clinic in the state. Though our main clinic is in Anchorage, we have established multiple satellite clinics across Alaska over the years. We have held clinics in Wasilla, Soldotna, Homer, Kodiak, Valdez, Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan. With the onset of COVID-19 travel became much more challenging, but we have been able to continue treating both established and new patients via telehealth. With the rapid adoption of telehealth, we were able to provide care to these patients that would have been left without our specialty services.

Some people believe that telehealth should be reimbursed at rates lower than in-person rates. This would be detrimental to our telehealth practice. When providing telehealth services to my patients I continue to be present in my office, I still must pay staff, overhead, insurance and all the other costs of maintaining a physical practice. Telehealth patient visits must be scheduled, medical records maintained, prescriptions managed like all the other components of a patient visit. Telehealth patients are still contacted by our schedulers, medical assistants and nurses like patients visiting in person. Costs are in no way reduced when providing services via telehealth. As the cost of running a medical practice has gone up considerably, reimbursement rates have not. To cut them by not paying telehealth visits in parity would be detrimental.

Medicaid payment parity is essential. Without payment parity many physicians would not be able to continue to provide telehealth services. We would most likely have to decrease or quit offering telehealth options altogether. This would leave many Alaskans without the continuity of care they have been able to continue over the last two years.

I urge you to support payment parity in SB175 with your full support. Please feel free to contact me for further discussion.

Sincerely,



Melinda M. Rathkopf, MD, FAAAAI, FAAAAI, FAAP
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Director, Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Center of Alaska

Cc: Honorable David Wilson at Senator.David.Wilson@akleg.gov