RetireSafe
Standing Up For America's Seniors!

February 6, 2017

Senator David Wilson
Chair, Senate Health & Social Services Committee

Senator Mia Costello
Chair, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee

Alaska State Capitol
4th Ave and Main Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senators Wilson and Costello,

As the President of RetireSafe, a nationwide non-partisan non-profit organization with more than 150,000 supporters (629 in Alaska), I urge you to support Senate Bill 32, a bill that addresses how your state will deal with biosimilars, also referred to as "interchangeable biological products." We have seen the significant impact biologic medicines have had in improving the quality of the health of Americans, and this has given us a vested interest in seeing biosimilar medicines introduced to the U.S. market. This bill, with its communication requirements included, is essential to providing a higher quality of care for patients in Alaska.

SB 32 updates current Alaska law to allow for the substitution of interchangeable biologic products at the retail pharmacy, and will increase access to lower cost drugs for patients who rely on these medicines to treat serious and chronic diseases. While biosimilars are revolutionizing treatment possibilities for millions of patients, there are inherent safety challenges associated with this class of medicines. The issue of substitution has been a new challenge for policymakers, and we fear that if safety is not made a paramount concern moving forward, then it will inhibit widespread trust in this class of medical treatment and delay the overall acceptance of biosimilars by healthcare professionals.

We believe that when interchangeable biosimilar products are substituted by a pharmacist, communication between patients, pharmacists and health care providers is essential to safe patient care.

Because this groundbreaking medicine and its structure is so complex and unique, it seems like common sense to require that a patient's physician is notified if a biosimilar is substituted by the pharmacist. A nationwide survey that our organization conducted received over 1,400 replies. Over 90% of the respondents thought that communication between the doctor, patient and pharmacist should be required when a substitution is made concerning biologics, biosimilars and interchangeable biologics.

Already, 26 states and Puerto Rico have passed similar biologic substitution legislation, and it is now Alaska's turn to pass SB 32 with the proper communications provisions. We know that you are also committed to protecting patient safety and want to safeguard the citizens of Alaska. It is because of that dedication to our community that we ask you for your support in this issue.

Thank you for your consideration.

CC: Members, Senate Health & Social Services Committee
Members, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee