

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

HOUSE LABOR & COMMERCE COMMITTEE



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House Bill 362 Respiratory Care Licensure

Sponsor Statement

In Alaska today, respiratory therapists, the clinicians who manage ventilators, assist with life-saving procedures, and provide essential care to patients with respiratory failure, are not required to hold a license. This creates a dangerous gap in oversight, accountability, and public protection. Alaska is the only state in the United States that does not professionally license Respiratory Care Practitioners. The purpose of HB 362 is to create a licensing process to increase patient safety and bring Alaska up to national standards. Patient safety must be a non-negotiable standard in our health care system.

This bill establishes licensing for Respiratory Care Practitioners, aligning Alaska with every other U.S. state. It ensures that only qualified, credentialed professionals deliver this complex, high-risk care. Key provisions of the bill include:

- Implementing licensure for Respiratory Care Practitioners in Alaska—a crucial step toward protecting patients and ensuring professional accountability.
- Defining a clear scope of practice in line with national standards, establishing bi-annual renewal, and requiring continuing education to keep clinical skills up to date.
- Requiring the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential for new licensees, aligning with national standards and current health care needs.
- Grandfathering existing Certified Respiratory Therapists (CRTs) working in the state, recognizing their service while maintaining a high standard of care.

Respiratory Care Practitioners manage some of the most technically complex and life-critical tasks in patient care, especially in intensive care units, emergency departments, and during public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Without licensing, there is no formal way to ensure these providers meet minimum qualifications or to protect the public from negligence or misconduct.

Passing HB 362 is a regulatory update, but more importantly, it is a vital patient safety reform. It protects patients, modernizes our health care system, and reaffirms our commitment to high-quality, professional care for Alaskans.