

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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HB 347 – Occupational Therapy

Sponsor Statement - March 9th, 2026

Alaska’s occupational therapy statute has not kept pace with modern health care, and today it primarily describes occupational therapists as helping patients “cope” with limitations. That language understates what licensed occupational therapists are trained to do and creates unnecessary barriers to fully using their skills to help Alaskans live safely and independently. HB 347 updates this statute so that it reflects current educational and national standards, and long-standing clinical practice in occupational therapy.

HB 347 clarifies that occupational therapists not only help patients cope, but also “restore, rehabilitate, and enhance function” after injury, illness, disability, or decline. This description aligns with what occupational therapists do every day in hospitals, outpatient clinics, homes, schools, and long-term care settings across the country. Without this update, Alaskans risk receiving a narrower level of care defined by outdated wording rather than by modern standards of practice. By passing HB 347, Alaska’s statutes will align with the services that occupational therapists are educated, examined, and licensed to provide.

This bill improves access and timeliness of care by removing ambiguity that can slow referrals and treatment. Clear scope language will help patients move more quickly from diagnosis or injury to the hands-on therapy that restores function in daily life. This can mean faster rehabilitation after surgery or stroke, fewer delays that prolong disability, and reduced need for long-distance travel when services can be provided more effectively and efficiently in local settings. HB 347 enables better use of the existing rehabilitation workforce while maintaining all current licensure and regulatory safeguards.

HB 347 does not create a new or expanded scope of practice beyond national norms. Instead, it clearly describes services that are already part of standard occupational therapy education and practice. These elements are consistent with national accreditation standards, professional education requirements, and the way occupational therapy is practiced in other states. By modernizing and clarifying the statute, the bill supports team-based care and allows occupational therapists to fully contribute their expertise alongside physicians, nurses, physical therapists, and other providers.