

Alaska State Senate
Senator Forrest Dunbar

Session:
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-6944



Interim:
1500 W. Benson Blvd.
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 269-0246

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Sponsor Statement: SB 248 – Genetic Counselor Licensing

Senate Bill 248 provides a licensure process for genetic counselors. Genetic counselors are health care providers who provide counseling, education, and psychosocial support around genetic testing. These supports include screening for familial and hereditary cancer risks and informing treatment plans for patients currently fighting cancer.

Genetic counselors are employed in a wide range of clinical care, academic, laboratory, research, and biotechnology settings. Genetic counselors have significant training and expertise in human and medical genetics obtained through a two-year master's level program. In the clinical care setting genetic counselors are found in the specialties of pre-natal, pediatrics, oncology, cardiology, neurology and many other specialties. Genetic counselors work hand in hand with physicians and other health care providers.

Alaska is one of only 12 states without licensure for genetic counselors, which means there is no legal standard for who can represent themselves as genetic counselors. Medical genetics is a rapidly growing field, with new tests and treatment modalities becoming available all the time. Licensure would provide a standard for patient care, and it would allow genetic counselors services to be more easily available to Alaskans – including the ability to bill to insurance. Licensure for genetic counselors would improve access to care and increase employment opportunities in a fast-growing field.

Licensure is necessary for health care providers to bill for services provided by genetic counselors. Without licensure and the corresponding ability to bill for services, only Alaska's largest providers can employ genetic counselors, who currently pay their salaries out of general overhead. This is unsustainable and discriminates against small communities and smaller health care providers.

By ensuring more efficient, precise, and timely care, genetic counseling enables faster and more cost-effective healthcare, including by avoiding the need for unnecessary diagnostic tests. This kind of efficiency, enabled by rapidly advancing technology, is essential as we seek to sustain health coverage and keep costs under control.