

REPRESENTATIVE MIKE PRAX
ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE HOUSE DISTRICT 33

SESSION
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 465-4797
Toll Free: (800) 860-4797



DISTRICT
1292 Sadler Way, Suite 308
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: (907) 451-2723
Fax: (907) 456-3346

Legislative History of Naturopathic Licensing and Scope of Practice in Alaska

I. Establishment of Naturopathic Licensing (1986)

Naturopathic licensure in Alaska was first established through **Chapter 56, SLA 1986**, which created the statutory framework governing the practice of naturopathy in the state.

The 1986 legislation established the following provisions:

- Prohibited the practice of naturopathy in Alaska without a license.
- Established the licensure process through the Division of Occupational Licensing within the Department of Commerce and Economic Development.
- Required applicants to possess:
 - A degree from an accredited four-year college or university,
 - A degree from a four-year school of naturopathy, and
 - Licensure in a state requiring an examination.
- Required practitioners to disclose to patients that they were practicing naturopathy.
- Required disclosure when a practitioner did not carry malpractice insurance.
- Restricted naturopaths from:
 - Prescribing prescription drugs,
 - Prescribing controlled substances or poisons,
 - Performing surgery, and
 - Using the title “physician.”

The law also established disciplinary authority and enforcement provisions, including:

- Grounds for license suspension, revocation, or refusal to license for fraud, criminal activity, professional incompetence, addiction, or immoral conduct.
- Disciplinary sanctions ranging from reprimand to revocation of a license.
- Criminal penalties for practicing without a license (misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$1,000 fine).
- Penalties for fraudulently obtaining or altering a license.

The statute defined naturopathy as:

“The use of hydrotherapy, dietetics, electrotherapy, sanitation, suggestion, mechanical and manual manipulation for stimulation of physiological and psychological action to establish a normal condition of mind and body.”

Additional conforming statutory changes included:

- Adding naturopaths to licensing and regulatory duties within the Department of Commerce.
 - Adding licensed naturopaths to healthcare provider definitions within medical malpractice statutes.
 - Excluding naturopathic services from coverage under the state’s Chronic and Acute Medical Assistance program.
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II. Early Legislative Efforts to Expand Scope of Practice

23rd Legislature (2003–2004)

The first significant legislative effort to expand naturopathic scope of practice occurred during the **23rd Legislature**.

HB 434 – Representative Richard Holm

HB 434 proposed significant changes to naturopathic prescribing authority.

Key provisions included:

- Removing the prohibition on prescribing “**prescription drugs.**”
- Replacing that restriction with a narrower prohibition on prescribing “**psychotherapeutic drugs.**”
- Replacing the prohibition on prescribing “**poisons**” with a prohibition on prescribing “**psychotropic substances.**”

The effect of these changes would have been to broaden naturopaths’ authority to prescribe medications and perform certain treatments. The bill also included provisions outlining substances and treatments naturopaths could prescribe or administer.

Although HB 434 did not pass, it represented an early legislative effort to expand naturopathic scope of practice similar in concept to provisions later proposed in HB 115.

III. Legislative Task Force on Naturopathic Scope of Practice

SB 306 – Senator Ralph Seekins (2004)

SB 306 was enacted as **Chapter 78, SLA 2004**.

The legislation created a **nine-member task force** to evaluate naturopathic scope of practice and related policy questions.

The task force was directed to examine:

1. Comparative education and training between naturopaths and medical doctors.
2. Appropriate scope of practice for prescribing prescription medications.
3. Appropriate scope for non-pharmacological treatments, including minor surgical procedures.
4. The structure and operation of collaborative agreements with other medical professionals.
5. Liability issues associated with collaborative practice.
6. Other issues relevant to naturopathic practice.

Task force membership included legislators and representatives from key healthcare professions, including:

- Senator Ralph Seekins
- Representative Lesil McGuire
- Alaska State Medical Association
- Alaska State Medical Board
- Alaska Pharmacists Association
- A nurse practitioner representative
- Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
- Two licensed naturopaths

The task force was initially required to submit findings and recommendations by **December 1, 2004**.

However, the deadline passed before the task force convened.

SB 42 – Extension of Task Force (2005)

SB 42 extended the reporting and termination dates by one year.

The task force met several times in 2005, but no final report or legislative recommendations were formally submitted.

IV. Subsequent Legislative Attempts to Expand Scope of Practice

Since 2003, multiple legislative proposals have been introduced seeking to broaden naturopathic practice authority.

Sponsors have included members of both major political parties, demonstrating bipartisan interest in the issue.

Legislators sponsoring such proposals include:

- Representative Holm (R)
- Representative Guttenberg (D)
- Senator Bettye Davis (D)
- Representative Cathy Munoz (R)
- Senator Lesil McGuire (R)

- Representative Bob Olson (R)
- Representative Geran Tarr (D)
- Senator Cathy Giessel (R)
- Representative Jennifer Johnston (R)
- Representative Bart LeBon (R)
- Senator Scott Kawasaki (D)
- Representative Mike Prax (R)

Across these efforts, **eight Republican legislators and four Democratic legislators** have sponsored legislation seeking to expand naturopathic scope of practice.

Bills addressing naturopathy have been introduced in **nine separate legislatures between 2003 and 2023**, reflecting a long-standing policy discussion within the Alaska Legislature.

V. Relevant Alaska Supreme Court Decisions

Huffman v. State of Alaska

In this case, parents sought to exempt their child from a tuberculosis skin test required for school attendance. The parents presented a medical waiver signed by a naturopath. The court held that:

- Alaska statutes limit the title “**physician**” to certain licensed medical professionals.
- Naturopaths are explicitly prohibited from using the title “physician.”
- Therefore, naturopaths lack authority to issue medical waivers reserved for physicians.

The court ultimately ruled that the state’s interest in preventing the spread of tuberculosis outweighed the parents’ claims.

Alaska Association of Naturopathic Physicians v. State of Alaska

In this case, naturopaths challenged regulations issued by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development restricting their ability to prescribe prescription medicines.

Naturopaths argued that the statutory prohibition applied only to “**prescription drugs,**” not “**prescription medicines.**”

The state argued that:

- Injectable vitamins and similar substances qualify as prescription medicines.
- The statute only allows use of non-prescription dietetics.

The Alaska Supreme Court concluded that legislative intent controls and that when the legislature intends to grant prescriptive authority to a medical profession, it does so **explicitly**.

Because Alaska statutes did not explicitly authorize naturopaths to prescribe injectable vitamins or prescription medicines, the court upheld the state’s regulations.

VI. Changes to Statutes Since 1986

While the fundamental statutory framework remains largely unchanged since 1986, several modifications have occurred:

- Licensure now requires graduation from a four-year naturopathic program accredited or recognized by the **Council on Naturopathic Medical Education**.
 - Applicants must pass the **Naturopathic Physicians Licensing Examination (NPLEX)**.
 - Temporary licenses may be issued to applicants awaiting examination.
 - Administrative appeals are now heard by the Office of Administrative Hearings.
 - The statutory definition of “dietetics” has been expanded to include herbal and homeopathic remedies.
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VII. Workforce Considerations

Data from the Division of Corporations, Business, and Professional Licensing indicates that there has been a decline in the number of licensed naturopathic doctors in the state.

- In 2014, the number of licensed naturopaths in the state peaked at **62 licensed practitioners** in the state.
- By 2019, that number had declined to **46 licensed practitioners** in the state.
- In 2026, there are **38 licensed practitioners** in the state.

Invited and public testimony has indicated that Alaska’s comparatively limited scope of practice may discourage naturopaths from practicing in the state.

VIII. Conclusion

Since Alaska first licensed naturopaths in 1986, the legislature has repeatedly considered proposals to modify their scope of practice. Over the past two decades, numerous bills sponsored by legislators from both political parties have sought to address prescriptive authority, scope of treatment, and regulatory oversight.

These repeated legislative efforts demonstrate that the issue of naturopathic scope of practice has been an ongoing policy discussion within the Alaska Legislature.

House Bill 147 represents the most recent proposal in this continuing legislative dialogue.

Naturopathy Measures Introduced in Alaska’s State Legislature (1993-2023)

| Legislature | Bill | Final Status | Title | Primary Sponsor(s) |
|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|
| 23rd (2003-2004) | HB 434 | (H) HES | An Act relating to the practice of naturopathic medicine; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Holm |
| | SB 306 | Ch. 78 SLA 2004 | Relating to the practice of naturopathic medicine; and providing for an effective date. | Sen. Seekins |
| 24th (2005-2006) | SB 42 | Ch. 7 SLA 2005 | Extending the reporting date for and the termination date of the Task Force on Naturopathic Scope of Practice; and providing for an effective date. | Sen. Seekins |
| 25th (2007-2008) | HB 363 | (H) HES | An Act relating to naturopaths and to the practice of naturopathy; establishing an Alaska Naturopathic Board; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Guttenberg |
| | SB 107 | (S) FIN | | Sen. Davis |
| 26th (2009-2010) | HB 282 | (H) FIN | An Act relating to naturopaths and to the practice of naturopathy; establishing an Alaska Naturopathic Medical Board; authorizing medical assistance program coverage of naturopathic services; amending the definition of 'practice of medicine'; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Munoz |
| | SB 70 | (S) L&C | An Act relating to naturopaths and to the practice of naturopathy; establishing an Alaska Naturopathic Medical Board; authorizing medical assistance program coverage of naturopathic services; and providing for an effective date. | Sen. Davis |
| 27th (2011-2012) | HB 122 | (H) L&C | An Act relating to naturopaths and to the practice of naturopathy; establishing an Alaska Naturopathic Medical Board; authorizing medical assistance program coverage of naturopathic services; amending the definition of 'practice of medicine'; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Munoz |
| | HB 266 | (H) L&C | An Act relating to the practice of naturopathy; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Munoz, Tuck, Thompson |
| | SB 175 | (H) L&C | | Sen. McGuire |
| 28th (2013-2014) | HB 7 | (H) L&C | | Rep. Olson |

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|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|--|---------------|
| 30th (2017-2018) | HB 326 | (H) L&C | An Act relating to the practice of naturopathy; relating to the licensure of naturopaths; relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Tarr |
| | SB 120 | (S) L&C | | Sen. Giessel |
| 31st (2019-2020) | HB 91 | (H) L&C | An Act relating to the practice of naturopathy; establishing the Naturopathy Advisory Board; relating to the licensure of naturopaths; relating to disciplinary sanctions for naturopaths; relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; and providing for an effective date. | Rep. Johnston |
| 32nd (2021-2022) | HB 40 | (H) L&C | | Rep. LeBon |
| | SB 38 | (S) L&C | | Sen. Kawasaki |
| 33rd (2023-2024) | HB 115 | (H) Finance | | Rep. Prax |
| | SB 44 | (S) L&C | | Sen. Giessel |
| 34 th (2025-2026) | HB 147 | | "An Act relating to the practice of naturopathy." | Rep. Prax |
| | SB 193 | | | Sen. Kawasaki |

*Originally Prepared by Legislative Research,
Updated by Riley Nye-Staff to Representative Prax
(907) 465-4838*