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February 28, 2012

The Honorable Bill Stoltze, Co-Chair
House Finance Committee
Alaska Capitol, Room 515
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

The Honorable Bill Thomas, Co-Chair
House Finance Committee
Alaska Capitol, Room 505
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: HB 78 (Herron)--Support

Dear Co-Chairs Stoltze and Thomas:

On behalf of the members of AARP in Alaska, we encourage you and your colleagues on the House Finance Committee to support HB 78, authored by Representative Bob Herron and co-sponsored by your Committee colleague Representatives Edgmon as well as Representatives Feige, Millet, and Tuck.

The intent of HB 78 is to provide incentives for health care providers, especially for expertise that is in short supply in Alaska as well as to secure providers in our many underserved geographic areas.

AARP approaches HB 78 from the standpoint of the customer. Our members are the group most likely to need health care services and are often the first ones to face critical health care problems because they cannot find a provider.

You are well aware of our health care workforce shortages in Alaska. If our members cannot find a health provider, the results can be bad for them as well as for the state.

Postponing a needed health visit often results in health deterioration and, in many cases, more intense and more expensive treatment. With an increase in providers, our members are more likely to seek prevention and early treatment. The overall health status of older Alaskans will improve.

However, if our members cannot find a health care provider, Alaska will be the loser.

As you know, prior to 1990 many older Alaskans left the state after retirement because they could not count on finding medical facilities and providers to meet their needs.

This trend reversed and now Alaska has the highest percentage of older people who decide to stay in their home state after retirement. The economic value of these retirees is estimated at over \$1.7 billion.

We want our citizens to stay here after retirement. The most significant determination of where retirees decide to live is the availability of quality health care. We must have an adequate health care workforce if we are going to keep older Alaskans in our state.

HB 78 will go a long way in helping us secure that workforce.

AARP recommends an "AYE" vote on HB 78.

Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact me (586-3637) or Patrick Luby, AARP Advocacy Director (907-762-3314).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Marie Darlin, Coordinator
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CC: Vice-Chair Fairclough
Representative Costello
Representative Edgmon
Representative Joule
Representative Neuman
Representative T. Wilson
Representative Doogan
Representative Gara
Representative Guttenberg
Representative Herron