From:	Ash-Lee Waddell
To:	Health and Social Services; Sen. Forrest Dunbar; Sen. Cathy Giessel; Sen. Matt Claman; Sen. Löki Tobin; Sen. Robert Myers
Cc:	RHTP@alaska.gov
Subject:	SB281 Restore equity protections
Date:	Thursday, April 23, 2026 12:40:25 PM

Chair and members of the committee,

I am testifying today because I am concerned about what SB 281 could mean for small rural communities and for the citizens who depend on local care and local infrastructure.

I support improving Alaska's health system. But I am concerned that the amended structure may make it much harder for small rural nonprofits and community-based providers to compete fairly for future funding.

The materials for today's version of SB 281 remove the protections that previously required grant distribution across judicial districts and across organizations of different sizes. At the same time, the state's own Rural Health Transformation Program materials show that implementation grants favor advanced proposals with formalized partnerships, clearly defined roles, existing infrastructure, and built-in scalability and sustainability.

That combination matters. For a large health system or consortium, those requirements may be manageable. For a small rural senior center, clinic, or nonprofit, they can become a structural barrier. In practice, the message becomes: join a larger network or fall behind.

That is a serious problem for rural Alaska. Small does not mean low need. Local does not mean low impact. A senior center in a rural community may serve elders who face transportation barriers, aging facilities, isolation, staffing shortages, and limited alternatives. Those are high-need conditions, even when the organization itself is small.

I ask the committee to protect a real pathway for small rural applicants. Community need should not be measured only by organizational size, administrative capacity, **or the ability to build multi-party agreements**. It should also be measured by local reality: who is being served, what barriers they face, and what happens if that local provider is left out.

Please ensure that senior-specific needs remain visible, **that rural communities are not forced into dependency on larger entities just to remain competitive**, and that the final structure **preserves a meaningful lane for small, community-based**

organizations to access implementation funding directly when they can show need, readiness, and impact.

Thank you,

Ash-Lee Waddell

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