



WHITE SPRUCE MEDICAL

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Dear Senator Giessel,

I support Senate Bill 44 and urge its passage.

Alaska is experiencing a severe shortage of doctors. New patients often wait months to be seen. Primary care is in short supply. Naturopathic doctors (NDs) can help fill that shortage.

As you know, Naturopathic Doctors are trained to provide primary care. They practice as primary care providers in every state on the West Coast except Alaska where they are not allowed to prescribe medications or to do minor office procedures. As a result, many are choosing to leave the state and practice elsewhere. The number of licensed NDs has fallen by 50% in the last 10 years. Every young doctor I have worked with in the last decade (8 of them) has subsequently left the state. They want to be able to prescribe medications. They want to be able to practice as they were trained.

The State of Alaska has the highest health care costs in the United States. The recent pandemic made clear the great need for more medical providers in our state, prompting the State to increase efforts to recruit medical providers from outside. We have 50 doctors in place in Alaskan communities ready to provide primary care. We don't have to recruit them. We don't have to pay a moving bonus. All we have to do is to pass SB 44 to allow them to practice as they were educated and trained.

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) has historically opposed the expansion of the practice of Naturopathic Doctors in Alaska. They continue to claim allowing Naturopathic Doctors to prescribe medications and perform minor office procedures is a menace to public health. The reality is the safety record of Naturopathic medicine is better than the medical profession at large. Nationwide, complaints against NDs with prescription rights is approximately 20% of that for their MD colleagues. Nationwide malpractice rates for NDs with prescription rights is approximately 20% of that for MD's. Insurance companies are in the business of rating the true risk of malpractice. Naturopathic medicine has been rated as safer than medical care provided by MD's.

The American Medical Association has opposed the expansion of prescription rights across the country and across professions. As you remember, in 2017 ASMA opposed HB 103 to allow Optometrists to practice up to their level of education. They habitually oppose the expansion of medical care irrespective of the true effect on the public good. This desperate effort to limit the number of healthcare providers in our state is short sighted and a true threat to public health. Preventing the addition of Alaska's 50 Naturopathic Doctors to the ranks of primary care providers in our state is unconscionable. Not allowing them to practice to the highest level of their education and training serves to disincentivize the future recruitment of Naturopathic Doctors to Alaska.

Thank you for your support in improving the health of Alaska. Thank you for your support in passing SB 44.

Sincerely,

Scott Luper, N.D.

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