

January 21, 2024

TO: HHSS Committee

RE: SB 115

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the HHSS Committee

My name is Ed Hall and I am writing to testify against the passage of SB 115 as written. It does have some merit but unfortunately, I believe it could create unintended harm to patients in Alaska. I have been a Physician Assistant (PA-C) since 1990 and practicing in Alaska since 1994. I have practiced in family practice and occupational medicine throughout all those years. I have been involved with the profession both medically and politically throughout these years. I served on our state medical board from 2005 to 2013. I have also served on many of the offices that our PA academy has. I have heard and appreciate the frustrations that some PAs have regarding their practice and think that we have been able to make Alaska one of the more optimal states to practice in as a PA. SB 115 does have some potential to improve practicing in Alaska by eliminating some of the administrative aspects of maintaining a license to practice.

However, I believe it potentially creates harm because of the 2000 hours required to satisfy the requirement to be met before a PA can practice independently, is just not enough in most cases. While I am proud of the medical school model of training that we as PAs enjoy, it does not adequately prepare one to be independent. In most states even physicians are required to complete a residency of a minimum of three years before they can be board-certified and practice independently. 2000 hours falls far short of a reasonable time period for most PAs to be competent to practice independently. I have recommended to our academy that perhaps 5000 hours would be adequate experience before obtaining that independence but that would be conditional on some sort of competency assessment. That notion was eschewed.

You should be aware that there is a work group that was recently created by the state medical board to address some of the regulations that this bill is intended to alleviate. They have not had their first meeting yet but from my understanding will be addressing some of the administrative "obstacles" that PAs face in order to maintain licensure.

I have also heard rationale from some of my colleagues that we need to have the same latitude as Nurse Practitioners. In fact, we are trained differently than the Nurse Practitioners and it does take time for the two professions to accommodate allopathic medicine in a similar manner. Again, I would contend that in most cases 2000 hours is not adequate for either profession to be independent practitioners.

I would urge this committee not to pass this bill as written. I hope that the work group will be able to address the challenges that PAs face as we try to be an integral part in providing healthcare to Alaskans.

Respectfully,

Ed Hall PA-C

