

March 25, 2024
The Honorable Jesse Sumner
House Labor and Commerce
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, 120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for HB 226, Concerning Access to Lifesaving Medications

Chairman Sumner,

On behalf of Alaska Oncology & Hematology we appreciate the opportunity to provide public comment in support of House Bill 226. Alaska Oncology & Hematology has served Alaskans living with cancer for over 30 years and today we are proud to continue to support our communities in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Wasilla, and surrounding areas.

While there have been many advancements in oncology care, people living with cancer remain among the most vulnerable patient populations in our state. Each day, our patients and their families face unimaginable circumstances and difficult decisions that can mean the difference between life and death.

HB 226 aims to improve cancer care in Alaska by regulating "white" and "brown" bagging.

White bagging is a policy instituted by insurers and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), which forces cancer patients to await the delivery of their treatment regimen from a drug dispensing facility owned or closely tied to an insurer or PBM. Brown bagging follows a similar process but requires patients to first obtain their medication at their residence and then transport it to their provider's office.

These insurer and PBM policies not only take the dispensing process out of the hands of a patient's cancer care team but also disregard the need for same-day adjustments in treatment regimens, which are frequently required when cancer patients experience adverse side effects. For instance, if a patient exhibits changes in vital signs that make their current dosage unsafe, her oncologist would immediately adjusted her medication dosage, but due to white bagging, she would have to delay her next treatment cycle by an average of two weeks while awaiting the new prescription from the PBM's facility and hoping that her vitals have not changed once more.

White bagging and brown bagging substantially increase barriers to care for Alaskans and can significantly delay life-saving treatments, exacerbating a patient's condition and adding to the trauma and financial costs associated with the disease. Part of effective cancer treatment is closely managing patient outcomes through an established provider-patient relationship. Community oncologists are best suited to provide this support, not insurers and PBMs.

On behalf of Alaska Oncology & Hematology, we strongly encourage the House Labor and Commerce Committee to support and pass HB 226.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this critical issue impacting Alaskans living with cancer. If we can be of further assistance to you, please do not hesitate to email me at drklix@alaskaoncology.com



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