

Representative Herron
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska 99801

March 2nd, 2011

Re: A Pharmacist's Support for HB 78

Dear Representative Herron,

I am a pharmacist from south Florida who relocated in September 2010 to work in rural southeast Alaska. I would appreciate the opportunity to share my story and subsequent support for HB 78.

After putting myself through a bachelors in environmental science, I decided to move back into my parent's home to begin repaying my nearly twenty thousand in student loans. During this time I became very involved with a local children's hospital and nursing home. This volunteer work inspired me to return to college to pursue a career in pharmacy. I was accepted at one out of state and two private colleges of pharmacy. I knew any choice would result in massive student loans accrued during the four years required for a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Therefore, I choose a local private college, which allowed me to economize by continuing to live with my parents.

A week after graduating pharmacy school in May 2008, I was married. Despite various extraordinary efforts to contain debt, my student loan total had grown to roughly two hundred thousand. My husband and I felt a great responsibility to begin aggressively repaying my student loans in order to prepare for a family. As a result, I did not defer my loans to complete a residency and subsequently enter a more sought-after field of pharmacy. Rather, I entered the very demanding field of retail pharmacy. I spent two years working fulltime at an independent retail pharmacy and as a relief pharmacist at another pharmacy in Florida. I have come to value and respect the vital role a local retail pharmacist has in counseling and advising patients, collaborating with practitioners, seeking innovative ways to meet individual patient's needs (i.e. compounding medications), and often serving as a listening friend. It is a physically demanding and emotionally draining, but richly rewarding by the relationships built with patients.

In September 2010, my husband and I relocated to Prince of Wales Island to work at an independent retail pharmacy. We have seen firsthand the vital role this pharmacy plays in the community and overall health of the residents. Professionally, I have been enriched by working in a pharmacy with such a strong focus on serving and challenged by the multiple unique services the pharmacy offers to help patients, the community, and state. Part of my employment has been dedicated to expanding these services. For example, I have arranged for pharmacy students to come from other states to complete educational rotations at the pharmacy and the pharmacy plans to participate in the state safe medication disposal program. In addition, my husband and I have thoroughly enjoyed become a part of the Prince of Wales community. My husband has become a volunteer firefighter, joined a community volleyball team, assisted a local domestic violence organization with financial matters, and is leading the technology improvement efforts of a local church. I have had the privilege of starting a gymnastic program at the city recreation center with nearly sixty participants in four classes, I am assisting in the formation of the Prince of Wales Behavioral Health Coalition, and I was recently elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Alaska Pharmacists Association.

My husband and I would like to remain on Prince of Whales Island long-term, but there are costs involved with staying and the burden of my student loans forces us to be very cautious with our choices. From my perspective, HB 78 would be a powerful incentive to draw pharmacists to Alaska and encourage retention. I have witnessed much legislation that is well intentioned, but often a significant portion ends up benefiting or rewarding those who have not necessarily made the hard choices. In contrast, I personally found HB 78 to be distinctive. The reason for this is twofold: First, HB 78 will attract medical professionals to Alaska and rural areas in particular, thus benefitting the underserved in these areas. Second, HB 78 will actually assist those who have made the continuous rigorous sacrifices of time, energy, and finances to enter the medical profession in an effort to give of themselves in the service of others.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Dr. Julie McDonald