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Alaska has the fastest growing senior population in the country and seniors are staying in Alaska, which is good for our state. However, the increase in our senior population vastly outpaces our also aging healthcare workforce's ability to meet the growing demand. We have a provider shortage and growing demand which includes physical therapy, audiology, and speech pathology providers, all important to aging Alaskans.

We can help address the access to care challenges of an aging population and healthcare workforce shortage by embracing healthcare multi-state licensing compacts to diminish barriers to recruiting licensed providers from other states. To that end, AARP supports SB74 and 75 enabling Alaska to join the Physical Therapy Compact and Audiology and Speech Pathology Compact.

We urge your action to move this bill forward to passage this session.

Thank you,
Marge Stoneking

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Good morning everyone and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is David Jamison, I'm a Speech Pathologist and the owner of Talkabout Inc, a speech and occupational therapy clinic in Fairbanks, Alaska. I am fully in support of SB 75 and urge you to pass the bill. Talkabout has been in operation for over 20 years, and for the entirety of that time, we have had a 6 to 8 month long waiting list. We have been unable to resolve this waiting list primarily due to difficulty hiring new therapists and getting them up into Alaska, leaving our population, and your constituents, including our military families, critically underserved. SB 75 will be a step toward making speech pathologists more easily hireable in our state.

When I do hire someone it typically takes between 3 to 6 weeks for them to get an Alaska license, and because we work with insurance companies, once the license is received, the therapist must undergo an additional credentialing process where insurance companies examine the licence and their professional history. That means the best case scenario is that I will be able to gainfully employ a new therapist in 1.5 to 2 months after hire. In the case of Tricare, the average time before a new hire can work with those kids is 6-8 months. People can't wait that long to be gainfully employed, and they won't. They'll go somewhere easier to work, and we will continue to have a chronic shortage of healthcare professionals and underserved Alaskans.

SB 75 will not eliminate this problem, but it will knock a month off the employment process, which is an excellent first step. Once again, I urge you to pass the bill.

Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have any questions.

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