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From: Rachel Samuelson <samuelson.rachel@gmail.com>
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Subject: Proposed Amendments to SB 89

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Proposed Amendments to SB 89 – Ensuring Safe and High-Quality Care in Alaska

As a member of the Alaska Academy of Family Physicians, which represents over 300 family physicians across the state, we continue to oppose SB 89 as we do not believe PA's are trained for independent practice. However, if SB 89 is going to pass, we urge you to consider significant amendments to the proposed bill in the name of ensuring high quality, safe patient care in our unique state. **Specifically, we advocate for a substantial increase in the required supervised training hours to ensure that PAs acquire the necessary experience before practicing independently. Additionally, we believe independent practice should only be granted when a structured system is in place to ensure access to a more highly trained physician when needed.**

Physician assistants are valuable members of the healthcare team. However, their training is significantly different from that of physicians. While medical school and residency for a family physician require over 12,000 hours of supervised clinical practice across diverse specialties, including critical care, hospital medicine, surgery, obstetrics, pediatrics, outpatient medicine, and emergency medicine, PA training consists of approximately two years of formal education with only 2000 hours of supervised clinical experience, followed primarily by on-the-job learning under a collaborative physician. As a result, PAs are limited to the knowledge and experience provided by their mentoring physician, which varies widely based on specialty and training quality.

As currently written, SB 89 grants PAs the same level of independent practice rights as physicians despite a stark difference in training hours and experience. This significant difference in training and lack of structured oversight raises concerns about the quality and safety of patient care in Alaska.

Proponents of SB 89 cite data suggesting that independent PA practice is safe. However, this is a relatively new legislative trend, and no long-term studies have been conducted to confirm patient safety outcomes under these models. Furthermore, states that have allowed PA independence have implemented significantly higher supervised training hour requirements than those currently proposed in SB 89. For example, Utah requires 10,000 hours, Montana mandates 8,000 hours, and North Dakota while allowing 4,000 hours, maintains a team-based approach in which PAs must work under physician-led teams. We urge you to consider adopting similar standards to ensure that Alaskans receive the safe, high-quality healthcare they deserve.

Alaska's unique and often remote healthcare environment demands the highest level of medical training. While we recognize the staffing challenges faced by some rural and remote communities, we believe these concerns can be addressed through improved collaborative agreements rather than independent practice. The Alaska Medical Board has already taken steps to enhance these agreements, and their forthcoming updates will help ensure that PAs receive appropriate physician support while maintaining high-quality care standards.

We strongly encourage you to consider these necessary amendments to SB 89 to protect the health and safety of Alaskans. Thank you for your time and dedication to our state's healthcare system. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

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