

Alaska State Medical Association

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Senate Labor and Commerce
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Esteemed members of the Alaska Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

I write as the President of the Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA), which represents physicians and physician assistants statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

ASMA opposes SB 89 as introduced, expanding scope of practice for PAs well beyond national norms. If the legislature intends to expand PA scope, ASMA believes certain amendments to clarify the prohibition on independent surgery, ensure additional experience hours, and clarify professional credentials for patients are indicated.

ASMA's position is that physician assistants (PAs) are important members of healthcare teams throughout Alaska, and that these teams should continue to be led by physicians. PA training, due to its abbreviated nature (approximately 2,000 hours compared with 10,000 to 16,000 hours for physicians) and reliance on physician oversight throughout training is not suited to independent practice with no collaborative structure. The studies introduced in support of SB 89 supporting quality PA practice occurred in settings with physician oversight and collaborative agreements, and do not reflect the requested independent practice.

ASMA acknowledges that the historical medical board requirements for two collaborative physicians was burdensome, and ASMA participated in the working group throughout the summer of 2024 to modernize the regulatory environment for PAs in Alaska. Those changes have not yet been finalized, and PAs and the medical board have not had the opportunity to experience whether the updated regulations satisfy PA concerns.

Respectfully,

Kristin M Mitchell, MD
President, ASMA