

Written Letter of Support of Brian Webb
Senate Bill 20 – “CPR in the Schools”
Alaska State Legislature – Senate Education Committee
9 March 2025

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Brian Webb, and I've been in EMS for over 50 years, an Advanced EMS Instructor for 40 years, including 28 as a military combat and flight paramedic. I've treated countless cardiac arrests—on battlefields, in remote Alaskan villages, and in the air as a critical care flight paramedic. And today, I strongly support Senate Bill 20 to require CPR instruction in Alaska schools—not just as an EMS clinician, but as someone who's seen firsthand what early CPR can do, and what it costs us when it's not done.

I can't be more pleased to see this session's CPR in the schools bill having been removed from prior comprehensive education legislation. SB 20 should rightly stand on its own merits, without the background noise causing its defeat. Thank you to the sponsor and the many advisors who contributed. And as far back as 2005, many of us have tried to press for this legislation but have met with little success. I am truly heartened by this current bill's narrow focus.

The facts are undeniable: when someone collapses from sudden cardiac arrest outside of a hospital, their survival depends **almost entirely** on whether a bystander starts CPR immediately.

Let me say that again—**not after EMS arrives—but immediately**. Every minute without CPR decreases a person's chance of survival by up to 10%.

According to the **American Heart Association**, more than **350,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests** happen every year in the U.S., **but less than half receive bystander CPR**. Survival rates more than **double** when a layperson intervenes before EMS arrival.

This is a personal opinion: Our EMS programs should be all about community based support and building relationships, and for CPR in the Schools, it further saves teacher time and school costs. And selfishly, it's supporting future EMS workforce development as well. True fact: That's how I got snagged and caught the EMS bug 46 years ago. It was from former Anchorage Fire Department Paramedic, Norm Miller, who was Alaska licensed paramedic #1. And I hope Norm's smiling down on this hearing today.

But many volunteer EMS services from Ketchikan to Utqiagvik, already provide personnel as well as equipment for CPR in the schools. And a shout out to Prince of Wales Island, to the services supporting the schools in Hollis, Hydaburg, Naukatee, and Klawock, who are all providing the training, the supplies, and the manikins for those schools, free of charge.

That's where schools come in. Across the country, more than 40 states have passed laws like Senate Bill 20, requiring CPR training before high school graduation. And it's working.

In **King County, Washington**, where CPR education has been in place for years, bystander CPR rates exceed 70%—some of the highest in the nation. Their out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survival rate? **Nearly triple** the national average.

Here's another example. In **Texas**, a 17-year-old student named *Nyomi* performed CPR on her father after learning it just weeks earlier in school. He survived. That's not a headline—that's a dad who made it to another birthday because his daughter knew what to do. And I'd already mentioned the Juneau case in prior testimony.

Now, I understand there's some hesitancy about **hands-only CPR**—especially when it comes to its scientific validity. Let me clear this up.

Hands-only CPR is **not a gimmick**. It's backed by peer-reviewed science, endorsed by the American Heart Association, and recommended in national guidelines. A landmark study published in the **New England Journal of Medicine** in 2010 showed **no difference in survival** between conventional CPR and chest-compression-only CPR in adult out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. In fact, for **teenagers and adults**, hands-only CPR is often **more effective** because it's easier to learn, remember, and perform under stress.

Physiologically, chest compressions alone maintain circulation during the first critical minutes, **when the blood still contains oxygen**. What we need in that moment is to **move that oxygenated blood to the brain and heart**, not pause to deliver ineffective rescue breaths—especially by laypeople untrained in ventilations. But the physiology of the chest couple with active compressions and full release of the chest, does move air. That's why hands-only CPR is the gold standard for lay rescuer response today.

And the beauty of this bill? It's no-cost, high-impact, and easy to implement. CPR instruction doesn't require full certification. In most states, students receive 30–60 minutes of training during health class, often led by EMS volunteers, firefighters, or certified instructors. That hour could save a life—maybe even the life of someone in that student's own family.

I'll close with this: if we had a vaccine that could **triple** someone's odds of surviving a sudden cardiac event, we'd be rushing it into schools. CPR is that vaccine—administered not through a needle, but through knowledge and action.

Senate Bill 20 gives Alaska the opportunity to catch up with the rest of the country—and more importantly, to **equip every graduating student with the power to save a life**. Please pass this bill. Our communities are counting on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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