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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 392: EXPAND ADV. PRAC. REG. NURSE AUTHORITY

Version C

HB 392 updates statute so Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) and Physician Assistants (PAs) can provide more support for the seriously ill and their families. APRNs are Registered Nurses (RNs) with a master's degree in nursing and additional specialized education and training. Physician Assistants also have a master's degree and additional clinical training.

In 1984, Alaska became one of the very first states to give APRNs full practice authority. Full practice authority means APRNs can use their expanded knowledge and skillset to prescribe, diagnose, or treat patients independently within their specialization. A common example of this is Nurse Practitioners (NP), a type of APRN, working as primary care providers for many of us.

APRNs are authorized to independently oversee end of life care, including assisting with Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders and the Physician's Order for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST). Similarly, PAs examine, diagnose, and treat patients, including participating in end-of-life care discussions, as part of a health care team. However, statute does not allow APRNs or PAs to sign and finalize these documents—only physicians can. This can cause administrative delays and unnecessary additional stress for families if a physician is unavailable.

Additionally, current statute allows a registered nurse to declare a death but only if a physician documents the anticipated reason for the death. A registered nurse can also sign a death certificate, but it must be certified by a physician within 24 hours. HB 392 revises statute so APRNs and PAs can also certify a death certificate. While the bill is narrow in scope, it helps many and especially those at vulnerable times.

Passage of HB 392 brings Alaska in line with 34 other states and the District of Columbia where APRNs have full practice authority and are allowed to sign DNR and POLST form; 37 other states and the District of Columbia where APRNs have full practice authority and can sign death certificates; 30 states where PAs can sign DNR and POLST forms; and 28 other states where a PA can sign a death certificate.