

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS

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Sponsor Statement: HB 293 – Genetic Counselor Licensing

House Bill 293 provides a licensure process for genetic counselors. Genetic counselors are health care providers who provide counseling, education, and psychosocial support around genetic testing, such as screening for familial and hereditary cancer risks and informing treatment plans for patients currently fighting cancer.

Genetic counselors are employed in a wide range of clinical care, academic, laboratory, research, and biotechnology settings. Genetic counselors have significant training and expertise in human and medical genetics obtained through a two-year Masters level program. In the clinical care setting genetic counselors are found in the specialties of pre-natal, pediatrics, oncology, cardiology, neurology and many other specialties. Genetic counselors work hand in hand with physicians and other health care providers.

Currently in Alaska there are 7 genetic counselors, who live and work here, and at least one genetic counselor who lives here and provides genetic counseling to patients in other states. In addition, there are a number of genetic counselors who work for genetic testing labs or genetics consultancies who work with patients in Alaska but reside in other states. For example, a single out-of-state hereditary cancer genetic testing lab has 60 genetic counselors who provide these services, many of them licensed in all states that offer licensure and able to practice in Alaska by default since we currently lack state licensure.

Alaska is one of only 12 states without licensure for genetic counselors, which means there is no legal standard for who can represent themselves as genetic counselors. Medical genetics is a rapidly-growing field, with new tests and treatment modalities becoming available all the time. Licensure would provide a standard for patient care, and it would allow genetic counselors services to be more easily available to Alaskans – including the ability to bill to insurance. Licensure for genetic counselors would improve access to care and increase employment opportunities in a fast-growing field.