

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

Sponsor Statement: SB 215 Maintaining Federal Prescription Benefits at Pioneer Homes

The intent of SB 215 is to ensure residents of Alaska's Pioneer Homes continue to receive their Federal prescription drug benefits.

This past spring, Veteran residents of Alaska's Pioneer Homes were caught in the middle of a bureaucratic dispute. Officials at the Pioneer Homes would no longer accept prescription medications from the Veterans Administration because of safety concerns with how those medications are packaged and labeled. The VA will not change the packaging or labeling of medications sent to the Pioneer Homes and the Pioneer Homes cannot repackage the medications. Therefore, Veterans who were unable to self-administer medications had no choice but to pay the Pioneer Homes' pharmacy out-of-pocket for necessary medications that they were supposed to receive for free from the VA.

Thanks to a joint effort between the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, local public veterans' advocates and state legislators, a policy level solution was reached with the Department of Health and Social Services. State administrators found a way to safely administer prescription medications received from the VA and Veterans began to receive their free medications again.

SB 215 will prevent this type of problem from recurring by ensuring that federal prescription benefits will continue to be honored into the future. If state administrators identify a safety concern associated with providing federal prescription benefits, SB 215 will require the Pioneer Homes to cover the value of the denied benefit, so that residents can continue to receive the benefits that they have earned.

This bill would protect not only Veterans, but all Pioneer Home residents receiving Federal prescription benefits, including those from Indian Health Services. The Pioneer Homes have always worked with residents eligible for IHS benefits to ensure they receive their medications. However, if something changes in the future with the distribution of IHS drugs, SB 215 would ensure that Pioneer Homes would continue accepting these Federal benefits or cover the cost for affected residents.

With the passage of SB 215, Veterans and other groups who have earned Federal prescription benefits will no longer have to worry about not receiving their prescription medications because bureaucrats are unable reach, what should be, a simple agreement.

Please join me in supporting this legislation to ensure eligible Alaskans continue to receive the benefits they have earned.