

Alaska State Medical Association

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March 19, 2010

Honorable Bill Stoltze
Honorable Mike Hawker
Co-Chair, House Finance Committee
Room 519, 505 State of Alaska
House of Representatives
Juneau, Alaska

RE: CS for HB346 (26-LS1447\E) –Workers Compensation Advisory Council

Dear Representatives Stoltze and Hawker:

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) represents physicians statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

CS HB346 would eliminate the existing Medical Services Review Committee (MSRC). Because of this, ASMA supports the formation of the Workers Compensation Advisory Council but strongly recommends that the physician community have parity in representation with organized labor and employers. Additionally that representation should be split evenly between physicians that are proceduralists and generalists. The representatives of organized labor and employers do not actually treat injured workers but yet will have the potential for significant effect on the process of proper medical care.

Bruce Kiessling, MD was the first representative and sole physician on the MSRC who resigned in 2009 due to a family illness. Dr. Kiessling stated it best in his resignation letter to Trena Heikes, Director of the Division of Workers Compensation. He in part stated:

“...As a member of the committee since its formation it has been curious to see some of the progress and all of the stumbles as members and leaders have worked, with good intentions, toward “reform”.

To a physician, and which is why it is so important that physicians be at the table, with any reform discussion, “reform has to include measurement of patient care as well as a structure of accountability that will improve that care.

“Reform” to the committee has moved sluggishly in the first years and now with more urgency toward fee controls. It has been my strong assertion, based on 40 years in the community, that this will ultimately compromise care, or at least the best care that otherwise would be available. I have reviewed on several occasions why this will occur.

Fundamental to any of the committee discussions has to be the core issue of quality of care. Next it has to be accountability and improvement of that care. Only after that will the also hugely important issue of how will it be paid for come to the front and be discussed with integrity...”

Physicians need to be an integral part of reform to the Alaska Workers Compensation system. Indeed, outside expert medical consultants could be engaged. However, without meaningful local medical participation you will forgo local participation in the process resulting in difficulty with “buy in” to any meaningful reform, and potential serious problems with access to care for injured workers.

ASMA and I stand ready to help in the reform efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Brion Beerle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'B' and a distinct 'Beerle' at the end.

By: Brion Beerle, MD, President
For: Alaska State Medical Association