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February 8, 2013

The Honorable Lindsey Holmes
Alaska Capitol, Room 415
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Re: HB 44 (Registry for Advance Health Care Directives) - Support

Dear Representative Holmes,

On behalf of the 94,000 members of AARP Alaska, we are pleased to offer our support for House Bill 44, which provides for the establishment of an electronic registry of individual advance directives through the Department of Health and Social Services. This is an important step in the development of a comprehensive approach to end of life planning, which provides adults of all ages the opportunity to articulate their personal wishes in the event of a medical situation where they may not be able to express themselves in the moment.

While Alaska statute already provides for the ability of persons to establish their own advance directives (AS 13.52 Health Care Decisions Act), it is nevertheless important to provide means for these to be more easily available and communicated to medical professionals and decision makers at the time of need. Advance directives have little value if they are not accessible to those who provide care. The electronic advance directive registry gives one more opportunity for the individual patient's choices to be noted, understood and honored, something each of us would wish for ourselves in such a situation.

AARP supports the right of all persons to be full participants in their own health care, including at times of emergency or end of life. Together with designation of health care proxies (Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care), and especially in the context of ongoing conversations with the primary care physician and family members about one's personal medical wishes, the registry provides increased reassurance that those wishes will be considered in medical decisions. Additionally, the electronic registry represents another step toward an effective and integrated electronic health record, which is a fundamental goal of health care reform.

With the passage of HB 44, AARP Alaska will encourage our members and other adults to give more thought to end of life choices, and provide education and support to do so. The voluntary and confidential nature of the registry will provide incentive for more people to take part.

We urge passage of HB 44, and offer our endorsement. Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact us.

Thank you for your sponsorship and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



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