

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR FRED DYSON SENATE DISTRICT F

Sponsor Statement

CS for SSSB 80

An Act relating to the practice of telemedicine

CS SSSB80 introduces into Alaska's Medical Practice Act the practice of telemedicine, sets parameters for prescription of controlled substances without an in-person contact between physician and patient, establishes a definition for *telemedicine*, and provides that health care insurers may not require in-person contact between a health care provider and a patient before payment is made for services. With Alaska's large rural and remote areas, the need for telemedicine is especially acute with much of the state designated as medically underserved by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration.

CS SSSB80 will provide expanded opportunity for health care delivery for individuals and businesses throughout Alaska. Today, the only delivery of telehealth in Alaska is via the Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network (AFHCAN), established in 1998 to provide telehealth services for Federal beneficiaries in Alaska, including Alaska Natives. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Care Consortium (ANTHC) manages the telehealth program and provides statewide health and information technology services to Alaska Natives and American Indians, in addition to supporting local tribal health organizations. CS SSSB80 will allow the cost-savings and efficiencies of telehealth to be delivered to the many other constituencies in Alaska that do not qualify to participate in the ANTHC telehealth program.

In Alaska and nationwide, the ongoing discussion of how to provide greater access to health care at a reasonable cost is becoming ever more relevant. Telemedicine is emerging as a key element in the delivery of health services to children, seniors and other vulnerable populations through the integration of technology and provider care. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is leading to increased demand that physicians interact with more patients. Telemedicine allows physicians to consult with more patients, and enables patients to meet with their physicians in a shorter time period. In terms of economic advantages, telemedicine saves travel time and expense for patients who otherwise have to leave home and work to see a health care provider, provides for more timely diagnosis of ailments, and reduces unnecessary ER visits.

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