



Alaska Psychological Association

Advancing psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting health and welfare

February 25, 2016

Senator Pete Kelly, Co-Chair
Senator Anna MacKinnon, Co-Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol Building
Juneau, AK 99801-1120

RE: Proposed Medicaid Reform Legislation- Revising Sec. 22. AS 47.07.900(4)

Dear Senate Finance Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee:

The Alaska Psychological Association (AK-PA) was formed, as a member based entity to advance psychology as science, profession and as a means for promoting human welfare in Alaska. As part of our larger charge to the people of Alaska we have been heavily invested in the process of Medicaid reform and implementing truly comprehensive and integrated healthcare that promotes the health and welfare of citizens and also reduces costs.

We believe that the intent of the proposed legislation is to provide for needed access to both primary care as well as behavioral health services, with the goal of making services available to those with lower levels of need, so that more expensive, "deep-end" services (e.g., inpatient hospitalization, ER visits) can be avoided. In addition, there is research that demonstrates that providing access to behavioral health services is effective in reducing the overall costs of healthcare, as the majority of patient visits to primary care settings have an emotional component, patients struggle with making the needed lifestyle changes that will allow them to manage chronic diseases and illnesses, and much mental illness goes untreated in the current system.

Medicaid programs should recognize and consistently cover basic, medically necessary mental health services provided by licensed mental health professionals, allowing them to practice within the scope of their respective licenses. This will promote patient choice of provider, and allow Medicaid patients to access the range of mental health services available to patients in the private sector.

If it is the intent of the Legislature to allow for the provision of clinical services by independently licensed mental health providers (i.e., psychologists, licensed psychological associates, LCSWs, LPCs, LMFTs), we recommend that Sec. 22. AS 47.07.900(4) be amended to read: *"4) 'clinic services' means services provided by state-approved outpatient mental health clinics, state-operated community mental health clinics, outpatient surgical care centers, physician clinics, medical clinics/primary care settings, and mental health services provided by licensed mental health professionals that fall under their scope of practice as defined by relevant Alaska statute."*

We strongly believe that eliminating unnecessary restrictions on the practice of mental health professionals by allowing them to provide and be reimbursed for their full scope of services is vital to the success of health reform in Alaska.

Our association hopes that you consider this revision. Please consider us as a resource.

Respectfully,



Michael Sobocinski, PhD
President, Alaska Psychological Association

cc: Members of Senate Finance Committee
Valerie Davidson, Commissioner, DHSS
Randall Burns, Division of Behavior Health, DHSS
Jeff Jessee, Mental Health Trust