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Dear Representative Vazquez,

I strongly urge the passage of your bill, HB234.

I am a Licensed Professional Counselor. I have practiced in Alaska since 1992, first in Juneau for 15 years and now in Anchorage. In the past I have worked as a counselor flying out to Kake to do substance abuse evaluations and counseling. I also worked for the State of Alaska, the Division of Behavioral Health for several years where I became acutely aware of the shortages of counselors across the state, and particularly in rural areas.

In my current private practice in Anchorage it has become very clear that access is not just a rural issue. I have clients who struggle with physical and medical conditions that make it difficult, uncomfortable and exhausting for them to come to my office for counseling. They along with many other people would benefit from HB234. I tried calling for permission from an insurer to serve an insured client and service was denied even though this individual suffers extreme physical problems. HB234 would allow that client and many others to continue to receive counseling services without having to leave their homes or beds.

Additionally, over my career as a counselor, I have had hundreds of people who have had to cancel appointments because a child was sick, or they had a last minute meeting run late at work. HB234 would allow those Alaskans to stay wherever they are and still have the benefit of uninterrupted counseling.

There are thousands of people who for dozens of reasons will benefit from the passage of HB234. If people are insured and their counseling fees are reimbursed by insurance if they are in my office why should insurance companies be able to deny those services delivered by telemedicine? It makes no sense.

Respectfully, Anne L. Henry, LPC