

I am hoping to be able to testify at the HB 123 hearing on Friday, but in case I cannot I wanted to offer written testimony.

As a consumer and as an employer it is long overdue that price transparency become available in the medical sector. There are really no other services that any of us would engage in without some idea as to the cost of those services – from an hourly rate of a legal representative or accountant to a full estimate for work on our automobiles.

I would also encourage the requirement to disclose the insurance carriers a provider and/or facility and/or services are under contract with as an in-network preferred provider/facility/service.

I had a personal experience with this phenomenon when I asked the wrong question “Do you take “X” insurance”. Well, of course they did as I was covered under a co-pay policy for the physician that covered both in and out of network providers. What I did not understand was that by not having all the facts, not only was the provider not in-network but the facility services were not in-network. So the other services and/or tests would be billed outside of my network agreements, at much higher rates than an in-network facility and with the additional 20% out of pocket over the in-network facility.

For this visit I had brought test results from an in-network provider, so it did not even occur to me that the facility would order in-house tests if they were not in-network. Well they did, I got the bill and was floored. I contacted the in-network provider and was given the procedure cost difference, it was significant. I then contacted the new provider and when I asked how they could charge so much more – the over-priced facility answer was “because we can!” That was not the response I expected.

This demonstrates that the lack of transparency not only leaves the consumer feeling completely helpless, there is no incentive for providers or facilities to consider basic customer service niceties or concessions. In other business sectors that first phone call, or certainly the two letters that followed, would likely have brought forth some form of concession and the staff in the accounting department would have been trained to better handle such a situation. But all that was offered was no response at all.

ECI

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March 14, 2018

Transparency

Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Chair
House Health and Social Services Committee
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol Building, Room 421
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Representative Spohnholz,

SolstenXP Inc. supports HB 123 and urges its passage. SolstenXP Inc. and its affiliate companies employ over one hundred employees in Alaska. Many of these people have families, all of which are consumers of healthcare services.

Rising healthcare costs in Alaska make it difficult to provide competitive compensation and benefits compared with out of state organizations. The local healthcare cost escalation is not sustainable. The ability to identify cost drivers starts with the price of the product.

Medical expenses should be known by the consumer, up front, before purchase, like any other product or service.

SolstenXP Inc. urges the 30th Alaska Legislature to pass HB 123 this year.

Sincerely,

Thomas S. Redmond II
Director of Human Resources
SolstenXP Inc.

Cc: Senator David Wilson, Chair
Senate Health and Social Services
State Capital Building, Room 115
Juneau, AK 99801

Senator David Wilson, Chair
Senator Natasha von Imhof, Vice Chair
Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Tom Begich

March 15, 2018

Honorable Senators:

Healthcare consumers are increasingly seeking information about the costs of healthcare procedures. Timely, transparent disclosure of healthcare costs is essential to protecting the interests of consumers and allowing markets to function efficiently. Healthcare is currently the only industry in which consumers receive a service without being able to understand the price in advance or in a predictable manner.

Many residents in our Alaskan communities have experienced difficulties in obtaining information about the costs of healthcare services in a timely and consistent fashion. These difficulties foment a culture of mistrust and create uncertainty, billing disputes, and an increased tendency to seek medical services outside of Alaska – none of which are in the best interest of our homegrown practitioners or the health of our state as a whole.

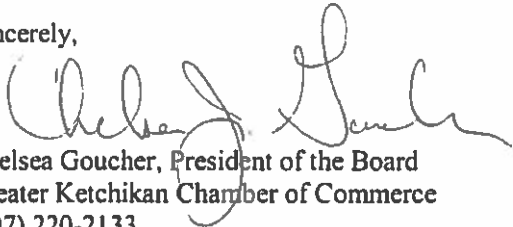
The Municipality of Anchorage has taken a proactive approach to mitigate these issues by adopting a municipal ordinance. The City of Ketchikan is currently considering a similar ordinance and is in the process of gathering public comment. These local actions prove that, across the state, there is a very real appetite to write pricing transparency standards into law.

These comments are respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce. Representing over 200 member businesses in southern southeast Alaska, we advocate for a sound business climate and work to promote a superb quality of life for our local residents. Supporting a statewide law that would alleviate many of the problems associated with opaque pricing practices in the healthcare industry is something that fits our mission perfectly.

We believe that House Bill 123, version G's requirements are reasonable and can be easily met by any reputable practitioner. While we will continue to advocate for improved healthcare transparency here in Ketchikan via municipal ordinance, we fully support this bill and understand that it would preempt local municipal code. We believe this bill in particular strikes a sound balance of protecting consumers while not placing an undue administrative burden on providers; in fact, we believe it's passage will bolster their competitive position. House Bill 123 will support community livability and resident satisfaction, helping to make Alaska a more attractive place to live, work, and do business.

Alaska deserves a standard set of requirements which are the same for all providers. The best way to achieve that would be for the Alaska State Legislature to take action to adopt House Bill 123, version G. Please consider seriously passing this piece of legislation through committee at the earliest time possible and, ultimately, passing it into law. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chelsea Goucher, President of the Board
Greater Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce
(907) 220-2133