



Representative Ivy Spohnholz  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Sent via email

April 8, 2019

Dear Representative Spohnholz:

Please accept this letter of support from the Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) for House Bill 89, Opioid Prescription Information. MSHF shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (MSRMC) and invests its share of the profits back into the community to improve the health and wellness of Mat-Su residents.

MSHF's first Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), conducted with community partners in 2013, included data analysis, public polling and input from 24 community forums. Our community ranked alcohol and substance abuse as the number one health issue in Mat-Su. In response to what we learned from the CHNA, we completed a Behavioral Health Environmental Scan (BHES). The BHES offered numerous recommendations, including the adoption of strict guidelines for prescribing narcotics.

The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) is helping in this arena. By example, under the leadership of Dr. Anne Zink, Medical Director of the MSRMC Emergency Department (ED), the ED has reduced opioid prescriptions written to patients by 61% in two years and reduced opioids given in the ED by 47%. She also helped craft an opioid prescribing protocol used by EDs across AK. Even with these measures and successes, more needs to be done.

Why? People are still dying preventable deaths in epidemic numbers. Mat-Su had 10 and AK had 114 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2018. 114 families lost a child, a father, a mother, a brother or a sister. Most individuals addicted to heroin were first exposed to opioids as the result of a legally written prescription for pain medication. They may have made different choices had they known the drug prescribed by their doctor was highly addictive. People occasionally need assistance dealing with pain, but when they do, they should be fully informed about the potential dangers of opioids. House Bill 89 will build upon a safer prescribing environment by ensuring that prescribers educate patients about the dangers associated with opioids.

The impact of drug abuse goes beyond the tragic loss of life. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority reported in 2015 the estimated cost of drug abuse to the Alaska economy totaled just under \$1.22 billion. That figure includes productivity loss, traffic collisions, criminal justice and protective services, health care, and public assistance and social services. These costs are borne by state and local governments, employers, and residents of Alaska.

While opioids play a vital role in some pain management, their misuse and misappropriation is devastating families, communities, AK and our nation. HB 89 is another step towards ending this epidemic. Thank you for introducing this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Chief Executive Officer