

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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House Bill 97 - Telehealth: Physician Assistants; Drugs

Sponsor Statement

The 2016 Medicaid Reform Bill (SB 74) provided for the use of telehealth, revising Alaska statutes to require the Alaska State Medical Board to adopt regulations and guidelines for physicians rendering a diagnosis; providing treatment; or prescribing, dispensing, or administering a prescription drug to a person *without* first conducting a physical examination under AS 08.64.364.

However, SB 74 only addressed physicians and the Board's interpretation was that the bill's provisions should not apply to physician assistants (PA's). This effectively barred PA's from practicing telemedicine, requiring them to first conduct in-person examinations.

House Bill 97 aligns statute with the intent of the Medicaid Reform Bill, clarifying that PA's can provide telemedicine in collaboration with and under the oversight of physicians. Under HB97, PA's are subject to the same statutory oversight as physicians regarding the practice of telemedicine, as well as the same disciplinary sanctions when appropriate.

Alaska, with its vast geographical challenges and limited access to vital healthcare, stands to benefit from this legislation. HB 97 will increase patient access to care, extending the reach of medicine to medically underserved areas.