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Jan. 28, 2020

Senator David Wilson
State Capitol Room 115
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: Providence Health & Services Alaska Supports SB 134

Dear Senator Wilson:

Providence Health & Services Alaska is pleased to support Senate Bill 134 MEDICAID COVERAGE OF LIC. COUNSELORS.

Providence has set the standard for modern health care in Alaska for more than 100 years. Today, Providence is the state's leading health care and behavioral health provider and largest private employer with nearly 5,000 caregivers across the state.

Providence Alaska provides outpatient, sub-acute, inpatient and residential behavioral health treatment, primarily on a voluntary basis. We continue to work to integrate behavioral health in primary care settings, and to provide comprehensive and compassionate care to women and children who have experienced trauma from abuse at AlaskaCARES.

As Alaska has faced growing mental health and substance use disorder epidemics, our behavioral health network has strained under the weight. Our existing capacity to treat is outpaced by demand and it is not uncommon to face long wait lists for provider visits. This is exasperated when services are not covered under Medicaid.

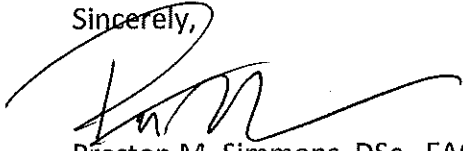
Roughly one-in-three Alaskans depends on Medicaid, which plays an essential role in providing behavioral health services. SB 134 would add professional counseling to the list of services covered by Medicaid, under the Medicaid State Plan.

SB 134 would also allow for counseling services to be provided outside of a clinic environment. This is critical to the ongoing efforts to integrate behavioral health into the primary care and maternal health settings.

SB 134 expands access to behavioral health treatment to more Alaskans, including our most vulnerable friends, family and neighbors. As resources continue to be stretched thin, licensed professional counselors can play an important role in reducing costly emergency room visits, shorter wait times for treatment, and increased capacity in the outpatient setting. This results

in not only better health outcomes, but reduced health care costs and lowers stress placed on an already fragile community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Simmons', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Preston M. Simmons, DSc., FACHE
Chief Executive, Alaska
Providence St. Joseph Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renee Rafferty', with a large, looping flourish extending to the right.

Renee Rafferty, MS, LPC
Director of Behavioral Health Services
Providence Health & Services Alaska