



February 21, 2020

Senator David Wilson
State Capitol, Room 115
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: SB 134 – Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Counselors

Dear Senator Wilson:

Alaska Regional Hospital offers this letter in support of Senate Bill 134, an act relating to medical assistance reimbursement for the services of licensed professional counselors.

For too long, available and appropriate services have not kept pace with the growing and changing behavioral health needs of Alaskans. At Alaska Regional Hospital, we see the impact. Our friends, families, and neighbors present in the emergency department when their challenges rise to a crisis. Our team cares for these patients *as we would our most cherished loved one*. However, we also know the emergency department is not the right location for this type of ongoing care.

The State of Alaska has made great strides toward addressing our state's behavioral health crisis. The 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver will expand access and offer new community based services as it rolls out across communities. The waiver seeks to address the behavioral health needs of Alaskans before their situations rise to the level of crisis.

Approximately 1 in 3 Alaskans receive their health care via Alaska's Medicaid program. SB134 expands access to behavioral health services by adding new services and provider types to the Medicaid program. SB134 also helps with the important step of integrating behavioral health services into the primary care setting by allowing counseling services to be provided outside of a clinic environment.

Thank you for introduction of SB134 and your continued efforts to expand access to needed behavioral health services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Julie Taylor
CEO