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February 19, 2020

Sen. David Wilson  
Chair, Senate HSS Committee  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 115  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Wilson:  
RE: SUPPORT SB 179 Nurse Compact Bill

For the past 17 years in a row, nurses have been identified in the Gallup Poll as the most trusted profession in America. Nurses are by far the largest segment of the U.S. healthcare workforce at more than 4 million. Nurses are no less important, and no less trusted, in Alaska with its many challenges in fostering a healthy population and caring for those who are ill or incapacitated.

Our nation faces pressing health care challenges—an aging and more diverse population, more people with more chronic conditions, millions more insured, rising costs, and a shortage of providers. We can address these challenges—now—by maximizing the use of nurses to address our nation's most pressing health care challenges—access, quality, and cost.

In 2001, the Center to Champion Nursing in America was formed, through the combined efforts of AARP, the AARP Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Through the Center, and guided by the Institute of Medicine's 2010 *Future of Nursing* report, action coalitions were formed in every state, including Alaska, as part of the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*. The Alaska Nurse Action Coalition, hosted by AARP Alaska, is dedicated to ensure Alaskans get the care they need, when and where they need it.

On behalf of our 85,000 members in Alaska and over 88,000 family caregivers in Alaska, AARP supports SB 179, which provides for our state joining the Enhanced Nursing Licensure Compact. Registered nurses (RNs) are vital to family caregivers and older patients through their trusted provision of high-quality primary, acute and specialty healthcare services. However, Alaska has a shortage of nurses and other essential health care professionals. And, this shortage is only getting worse.

One of the recommendations of the 2010 IOM report was workforce development, which now includes expanding the Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact. According to the Department of Workforce and Labor Development and HRSA federal data, almost half of all Alaskan-licensed RNs are over the age of 45, and there is a 22.7% difference between nurse supply and demand. Given current projections, Alaska will need 5,400 additional nurses by 2030.

Real Possibilities

The health care provider shortage hits older Alaskans hard. Older adults sometimes lack the ability or resources to get to their appointments because of mobility issues, long travel distances to a provider, and wait times for appointments. This risks their health and adds unnecessary stress to family caregivers. The RN Compact is a common-sense way to encourage nurses to provide care both in-person or through telehealth technologies in multiple states, connecting patients and their family caregivers with qualified primary care.

AARP Alaska supports the Enhanced Nurse Licensure Compact (RN Compact) because it:

- Provides cost-effective ways to expand health care access
- Facilitates the practice of telehealth
- Helps recruit nurses to our state and encourages Alaska-educated nurses to remain here
- Addresses needs of military families where a spouse nurse may move frequently
- Protects patients

The RN Compact makes it easier and affordable for nurses to practice across state lines without the cost or unnecessary delay of applying for separate licenses. This helps efficiently expand access, which is particularly important in Alaska's many underserved and remote areas. The RN Compact can contribute to reduced costs for healthcare providers that employ nurses and may ultimately drive lower cost for consumers.

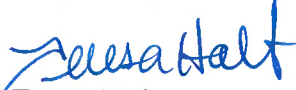
Notably, the Compact facilitates the delivery of telehealth. Telehealth capabilities are crucial in Alaskan communities with workforce shortages and when getting out of the house is difficult. In the landmark 2010 report *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, the Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) concludes that "there is perhaps no greater opportunity to transform practice than through technology...expanded use of online communication has resulted in so-called telehealth services that are not limited to diagnosis or treatment but also include health promotion, follow-up, and coordination of care. Delivery of telehealth services has, however... been complicated by variability in state regulations, particularly whenever online communications cross state lines." The RN Compact addresses these issues and will facilitate greater telehealth opportunities in Alaska.

The RN Compact can also help Alaska recruit new nurses, as well as help to retain graduates from our own Alaskan nursing programs. New graduates want mobility and maximum options for career development. When asked, nurses overwhelmingly say they prefer to practice in Compact states over non-Compact states after graduation. Thus, entering the RN Compact will give us a competitive advantage in recruiting new nurses to serve patients in our state.

Finally, the RN Compact has important patient protections that help ensure patients receive quality care. States that participate in the current RN Compact conduct federal criminal background checks to determine if a nurse is eligible for a multistate license. These screenings add a level of patient protection and security. License infractions are reported to the national NURSIS database to insure State Boards have up-to-date information about licensed RN's practicing in any state. As of today, there are 15,822 active RN licenses in Alaska, per NURSIS.

AARP Alaska supports participation in the RN Compact as it would help improve health care access for older Alaskans and family caregivers, and deliver cutting edge technology in health care service provision to help ensure Alaskans get the care they need, when and where they need it. Thirty-four states have already adopted the Compact and we look forward to Alaska joining too. Thank you for hearing SB 179, and we look forward to its ultimate passage and the governor's signature.

Respectfully,



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