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March 23, 2020

Senator Cathy Giessel  
Senate President  
State Capitol Room 111  
Juneau AK, 99801

Re: SB 241

Dear Senator Giessel,

The Alaska Hospitalist Group, LLC (TAHG) is a private medical practice employing 65 Hospitalists (Internal Medicine and Family Practice physicians) as well as 12 Intensivists (ICU physicians) and 6 hospital based Nurse Practitioners. We cover the majority of facilities in Anchorage, the Mat Su Valley and Soldotna. In short, we are the primary group that will be caring for COVID-19 hospitalized and critically ill patients.

I implore you to pass SB 241 because there is a crucial need to extend the Governor's declaration of a public health disaster emergency in response to the COVID-10 pandemic. To be clear, I strongly believe in the importance of due diligence in making decisions rationally and value the public process that typically guides our legislative process. Unfortunately, these are not typical times. It is essential that officials can act swiftly to respond to COVID-19 in order to do what is best for Alaskans.

Healthcare workforce capacity is one of the most significant concerns we have given the projections of this disease. Specifically, section 6 will be incredibly important if there is a surge on the hospitals and we need to marshal other resources from out of Alaska quickly.

We strongly request that following provision in section 7: "unless the health care provider has a preexisting provider-patient relationship with a patient that is unrelated to COVID-19, the health care services provided are limited to services related to screening for, diagnosing, or treating COVID-19." Many physicians have already been sidelined due to isolation precautions, but they could be providing telehealth from their homes. If this provision remains, we will be missing the point of telehealth which is both to increase and maintain capacity while protecting our workforce. Limiting telehealth to COVID-19 patients absent a prior relationship is an unnecessary restriction that could limit capacity during major disruptions to the health care system.

I appreciate your leadership and insight into how healthcare works. It will be necessary to think creatively and act swiftly during the pending crisis.

Regards,

Jocelyn Pemberton, MBA, FACHE  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Alaska Hospitalist Group, LLC

