



American College of  
Emergency Physicians®

ALASKA CHAPTER  
ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

February 21, 2021

Co-Chair Tiffany Zulkosky  
Co-Chair Liz Snyder  
House Health and Social Services Committee  
State Capitol  
Juneau AK, 99801

**RE: Alaska ACEP Supports Extending Disaster Declaration (HB 76)**

Dear Co-Chairs Zulkosky and Snyder:

The Alaska Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians is in strong support of HB 76 extending Alaska's public health emergency disaster declaration related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

After many hard months of caring for ill patients with Covid-19, we are heartened to see case counts and hospitalizations decreased for now, especially after the very challenging months of November and December. With vaccinations ramping up, there is a sense of hope that together we will bring the pandemic to a close. However, we remain vigilant in the ED as we know that it is not yet over, carefully donning and doffing PPE, protecting ourselves and our patients. The state needs to remain vigilant as well.

Though we are eager for the pandemic to be over, allowing the disaster declaration to end prematurely will only serve to lengthen the time we are forced to cope with Covid-19. The disaster declaration provides the state and its healthcare facilities with important flexibility and resources that will be needed to end the pandemic as quickly as possible. One example is around testing. With much of Alaska's population still vulnerable to Covid-19 infection and the specter of potential new variants of Covid-19, continued access to widespread testing is critical and the regulatory flexibility the disaster declaration affords allows alternative sites for screening/testing to operate. A big concern early in the pandemic was that ED's may be overwhelmed by well patients seeking Covid-19 testing for exposures or mild symptoms. Due to the alternative care sites this fortunately did not occur and enabled us to focus on the sickest patients.

Telehealth expansion is another crucial piece of the disaster declaration. The ability for patients to receive telehealth services, including from out of state providers, has allowed them to continue to access care while remaining in their communities, thus minimizing the risks associated with travel. If the disaster declaration is allowed to expire, patients may have this option removed, whether it be a visit with their cardiologist or behavioral health provider.

As vaccine production ramps up, we need to be able to continue to mobilize all resources to vaccinate our population as quickly as possible. Despite our state's geographic challenges, Alaska is still

among the top in the nation at vaccination rate. This in no small part is due to the flexibility the Alaska Disaster Act affords in allocating assets to assist in these efforts. Without a disaster declaration in place, this goes away, hindering the state's ability to bring Covid-19 under control.

HB 76 extending the disaster declaration is crucial in helping the state bring an end to the Covid-19 pandemic as quickly as possible. Alaska ACEP strongly supports it, and hopes the legislature acts quickly to pass House Bill 76.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Papacostas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicholas Papacostas MD, FACEP  
President, Alaska ACEP