



Organized Village of Kake

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(Federally Recognized Tribal Government serving the Kake, Alaska area)



February 9, 2021

The Honorable David Wilson
Chairman, Senate Health & Social Services Committee
Alaska Senate
State Capitol Room 121
Juneau, AK 99801
Via Email: Senator.David.Wilson@akleg.gov

RE: Senate Bill 56 to Extend the COVID-19 Public Health Disaster Emergency

Dear Chairman Wilson,

The extension of the public health disaster emergency (PHE) is vital for administrative, regulatory, and statutory flexibilities that have allowed Alaska to respond quickly and successfully to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alaska is leading the way in responding to the pandemic and it is vital that we continue to do so. The Organized Village of Kake, the federally recognized Tribe for Kake, AK is writing in support of Senate Bill 56 and its swift passage to continue these flexibilities.

As the federally recognized Tribe for the Village of Kake, Alaska, OVK provides a broad range of programs and services for Tribal and community citizens, including Lingit culture and language programs, a variety of social service and general assistance programs, alcohol and substance abuse programs, natural resource programs, domestic violence programs, and Tribal court.

The State's PHE has allowed for a series of flexibilities that have allowed for Governor Dunleavy's administration, specifically the Department of Health & Social Services and the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, as well as health care providers and facilities to respond effectively to COVID-19. A few of the important flexibilities made available by the PHE are:

Vaccine distribution – The powers authorized under the State PHE allow the governor to control the distribution of scarce resources, including scarce COVID-19 vaccines. Without the State PHE, the Department of Health and Social Services will not be able to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine using the State Vaccination Distribution Plan which prioritizes vulnerable populations, such as our Elders and our first responders.

Vaccine administration – The State PHE does not just support the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines, it also provides essential flexibility to allow more provider types to be able to administer vaccines. This includes the ability to deploy the Alaska National Guard for contact tracing efforts and vaccine administration.

Provider licensing flexibilities – Under the PHE, providers have received expedited, limited-use licenses that have reinforced Alaska's health care workforce during a time of severe strain. Alaska has fewer health care professionals per capita than most states, and there was a chronic need for providers in Alaska even before the pandemic.

Telehealth provision and reimbursement – The State's PHE also allows patients to see providers for telehealth services without first having an in-person visit. This has been important to keep patients and providers safe during the pandemic, but it has also allowed providers to bill third party payors, providing much needed funding to clinics who have seen patient visits decline dramatically during the pandemic.

Continued provision of medication assisted treatment for patients with substance use disorders – 12 AAC 40.943 allows a provider to see and prescribe controlled substances used as part of medication assisted treatment for substance use disorders via telemedicine during a declared disaster emergency without conducting required in-person exams. This flexibility has been used by rural providers to ensure patients do not have to go without treatment and can remain safe during the pandemic.

Alternate Care Sites – The State's PHE has been a vital component for standing up Alternate Care Sites (ACS) used for testing and treating patients for COVID-19 in non-traditional locations based on their clinical needs. For example, this flexibility allowed the State to establish a field hospital in King Salmon during the fishing season to help ensure local providers had the staffing and capacity to identify and treat COVID-19 in migrant workers. Generally, it has allowed for hospitals to establish an ACS that separates COVID-19 related care and treatment from non-COVID-19 care, keeping patients and providers safe.

Quarantining Sites – The State PHE also has made it possible to quickly stand up Quarantining Sites for COVID-19 patients during their isolation period. Without the State PHE, it would become significantly more difficult to stand these sites up, especially in our rural hub communities. This flexibility also supports local hospitality businesses which have suffered greatly due to decreased tourism during the pandemic.

Travel – The State PHE also made it possible to limit travel to Alaska and to our vulnerable rural, remote communities. These limitations have continued to protect rural communities in Alaska, especially those with community-based water and sanitation facilities, which face an increased risk of community-based transmission. Many of our rural communities cannot access the treatment options available at acute care facilities in a timely manner, making prevention from exposure to COVID-19 vital to individual and public health.

The State's PHE and flexibilities are distinct from the public health powers of local governments and the federal government, but necessary to allow the State to respond effectively to the pandemic. We urge swift passage of Senate Bill 56 by the Alaska State Legislature.

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Dawn Jackson, OVK Executive Director at cd@kake-nsn.gov.

Gunalcheesh,



Joel Jackson
President

CC: Senate Health & Social Services Committee Members
Alaska Senate
Alaska House of Representatives



February 12, 2021

Dear Co-Chair Stedman, Co-Chair Bishop, and Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) to encourage rapid passage of Senate Bill 56 - EXTENDING COVID 19 DISASTER EMERGENCY.

Small businesses across Alaska are significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These impacts range from sickness or death (when owners or workers have contracted the virus) to economic devastation from restrictive health mandates designed to control virus spread. Small businesses, and their employees, are threatened by both a reduction in health care capacity and increased local health mandates.

SB 56 incorporates key policy provisions designed to expand state medical capacity and lessen restrictions on commerce, including:

- Suspension of certain fees (business and professional licenses)
- Suspension of statute to allow for curbside alcohol sales
- Expanding telehealth and telemedicine capabilities
- Streamlining fingerprinting for certain occupations
- Allowing online sales for charitable gaming
- Suspension of insurance requirements

Governor Dunleavy has responsibly used powers granted to him to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency health and welfare policies have suspended rules impeding healthcare expansion while providing funding for critical medical infrastructure. The emergency suspension of rules promoting commerce and economic activity have kept small businesses viable as they respond to a patchwork of local health mandates. If the legislature does not extend the emergency declaration, small businesses will face a new round of local health mandates as health care capacity is reduced. Small businesses need the latitude they currently enjoy under the emergency declaration to keep their doors open and their work force employed.

Failure to pass SB 56 before the disaster declaration expires imperils the physical and economic health of Alaskan small businesses. NFIB encourages members of Senate Finance to take swift action and prevent further economic harm to small businesses by passing SB 56 from committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thor Stacey", with a stylized, cursive script.

Thor Stacey

State Director

National Federation of Independent Business

P.O. Box 211231

Juneau, AK 99821

1-907-723-1494

NFIB.com

From: Cate Ross
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Public Comment SB 56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 12:52:31 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to provide public comment on SB 56. My name is Cate Ross, I am a resident of Juneau, Alaska. I am writing to voice my full support of SB 56. Please consider voting yes, to extend the declaration of Alaska's public health emergency. We are clearly still in a state of emergency. Just because everyone is tired of the pandemic, and it's been going on long enough that it feels like business as usual, does not mean the risk level is any different. We currently have a much higher rate of transmission of covid-19 than we did when the disaster declaration was first put into place. We need to stay the course and do everything possible to support businesses and our economy safely, while always putting the health of Alaska as the top priority. To reiterate, I fully support and advocate passing SB 56. Thank you.

-Cate Ross

From: John S Nemeth
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Public Comment SB 56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 12:59:39 PM

Dear AK Legislature,

I would like to provide public comment on SB 56. My name is John Nemeth, I am a resident of Juneau, Alaska. I am writing to voice my support of SB 56. Please consider voting yes, to extend the declaration of Alaska's public health emergency. We are certainly still in a state of emergency. Just because everyone is tired of the pandemic, and it's been going on long enough that it feels like business as usual, does not mean the risk level is any different. We currently have a much higher rate of transmission of covid-19 than we did when the disaster declaration was first put into place. We need to stay the course and do everything possible to support businesses and our economy safely, while always putting the health of Alaska as the top priority.

Thank you,

-John

JOHN S NEMETH
[c] 313.318.5322
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318 Highland Dr
Juneau, AK 99801

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From: Lacy Wilcox
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Support for SB56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 1:12:28 PM

I am writing in support of SB56 and the extension of the disaster declaration.

The emergency isn't over, clearly (yesterday there were 476 new cases identified), and we need to stay vigilant in our efforts to triage the infected and vaccinate the population.

Please do not listen or be swayed by the conspiracy theories perpetuated by some in your ranks, they are not based in science or reality. I expect the legislature to be wise and not swallow up this misinformation. I am an essential worker, a mother, and a spouse of someone who is vulnerable, and I speak for my household consisting of 4 registered voters.

Eliminating the declaration would inhibit the availability and distribution of vaccines, obscure access to funding and critical supplies for our hospitals and clinics, inhibit testing and contact tracing, and other logistical support.

Again, please pass this legislation quickly, it has taken too long already, and should not have been allowed to lapse. It should also be implemented retroactively to Feb 14th.

Thank you,

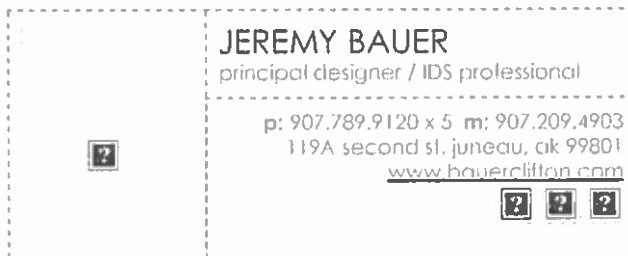
Lacy Wilcox
Juneau, Alaska

From: Jeremy Bauer
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Public Comment SB 56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 1:22:54 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to provide public comment on SB 56. My name is Jeremy Bauer, I am a resident of Juneau, Alaska. I am writing to voice my full support of SB 56. Please consider voting yes, to extend the declaration of Alaska's public health emergency. We are clearly still in a state of emergency. Just because everyone is tired of the pandemic, and it's been going on long enough that it feels like business as usual, does not mean the risk level is any different. We currently have a much higher rate of transmission of covid-19 than we did when the disaster declaration was first put into place. We need to stay the course and do everything possible to support businesses and our economy safely, while always putting the health of Alaska as the top priority. To reiterate, I fully support and advocate passing SB 56. Thank you.

Sincerely,



From: Jason Clifton
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Public Comment SB 56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 1:45:10 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to provide a public comment on SB 56. My name is Jason Clifton and I am a resident of Juneau, Alaska. I am writing to voice my full support of SB 56. Please consider voting, yes, to extend the declaration of Alaska's public health emergency.

We are clearly still in a state of emergency since the risk level has not improved. Inf fact, wWe currently have a much higher rate of transmission of COVID-19 than we did when the disaster declaration was first put into place. We need to stay the course and do everything possible to support businesses and our economy safely, while always putting the health of Alaska as the top priority. To reiterate, **I fully support and advocate passing SB 56.**

Sincerely,
Jason

From: Naomi Rozelle
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Public comment SB 56
Date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 3:45:34 PM

To whom it may concern,

I would like to express my full support of SB 56. I am a resident of Juneau Alaska and although I like the rest of our state am feeling extreme pandemic fatigue this emergency is clearly not over! Please take the people and businesses within the state into consideration and extend the much needed state of emergency. Again I as a resident of Alaska would like to be on the public record in support of SB 56.

Thank you,
Naomi R Hamb

From: Mario V
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: In support of SB 56
Date: Friday, February 19, 2021 12:23:13 AM

just wanted to register a public comment on SB 56. I am an Alaskan resident and I fully support SB 56