

Alaska State Medical Association

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February 2, 2021

The Honorable David Wilson
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol Room 121
Juneau, AK 99801

Transmitted via email

RE: Senate Bill 56 "Extending COVID-19 Disaster Declaration"
patient's informed consent"

Dear Senator Wilson:

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) represents physicians statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

ASMA would like to express its support for Senate Bill 56 and the extension of the COVID-19 Disaster Declaration until September 2021. While Alaska and the nation have made great progress in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, there remain significant concerns over its continued impacts to our state's overall health, as well as significant concerns over virus mutations and how those mutations will react to current treatments and vaccines. The extension of the Disaster Declaration will provide necessary tools for the state to continue managing the impacts of COVID-19.

One simply must look at the current rules governing access to the Alaska Capitol and the Legislature's effort to protect members and employees to see the recognition of the Alaska Legislature that responsible measures to protect the public are still necessary and prudent.

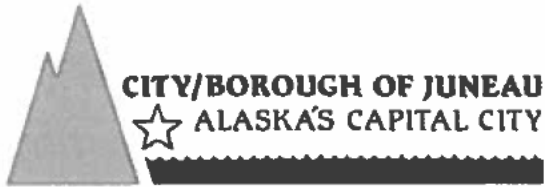
ASMA applauds the Legislature's actions last session, as well as the continued actions of the Governor and Mayors across Alaska in doing their best to make decisions to protect Alaskans. While we expect some disagreement on strategies and tactics and individual decisions under the Disaster Declarations, ASMA believes decisions are being made with the best available information and with the health and wellbeing of Alaskans foremost in mind. We ask that you pass SB 56.

Sincerely,



Pam Ventgen
Executive Director
Alaska State Medical Association

Cc: Suzanne.cunningham@alask.gov



February 1, 2021

Honorable David Wilson
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol, Room 121
Juneau, Ak 99801

Transmitted via email

Re: Support for Senate Bill 56
Extending COVID-19 Disaster Emergency

Dear Senator Wilson,

Please accept this letter as the City and Borough of Juneau's support for Senate Bill 56, Extending COVID-19 Disaster Emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a significant public health event affecting the well-being of our citizens and the economic stability of our community. A disaster declaration provides the foundation for local government to effectively provide an emergency response and to access federal and state funding that supports our doing so. In particular, we believe there is value in extending the emergency declaration until September 2021. While the end of the emergency is tantalizingly close, much remains to be done to protect our citizens. Local communities need the stability of such an extension to help stabilize emergency operations and plan for the next phase of response as we transition to the vaccination phase of the emergency.

CBJ has appreciated the work and support of the Legislature, the Governor, and the Department of Health and Social Services. In particular, the Division of Public Health has provided consistent and practical leadership during this challenging time.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

Beth Weldon
Mayor, City and Borough of Juneau

cc: Suzanne.cunningham@alaska.gov

Jody Simpson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 01, 2021 10:59 AM
To: Sen. David Wilson; Sen. Lora Reinbold; Sen. Mia Costello; Sen. Shelley Hughes; Sen. Tom Begich
Cc: 'Morley, Lisa A (HSS)'; Gordon Glaser; Lesley Thompson; Nona Safra; Paula Pawlowski; Robert Sivertsen
Subject: Support for SB 56

To all HHS committee members

My name is Mike Coons. I am the President of the Matsu Chapter of the Association of Mature American/Alaskan Citizens (AMAC) Action. I will be speaking for the vast majority of my members. In addition to speaking for AMAC Action, I am a commissioner on the Alaska Commission on Aging, I know that the commission is in support for of all senior citizens of the State of Alaska by supporting this existing SB 56. We also have two other Chapters, the Greater Anchorage and the Fairbanks Chapters. I got approval by Cheryl LaFollette, Fairbanks and Robert Coulter, Greater Anchorage to state here that both chapters are in full support of SB 56. That is the majority of over 500 chapter members. Also, State-wide, AMAC is over 7,800 concerned and strong mature citizens of this State, not to mention 2.3 million strong nation-wide.

The extension of the emergency powers that is requested by Governor Dunleavy in SB 56 will have a huge impact on the lives of all 142,000 plus seniors in the State of Alaska. This gives the Governor and his administration the ability to not only get the vaccines, be they Pfizer, Moderna, the up and coming Johnson and Johnson, Astra Zenaca, or others in the pipeline, but the means to get those vaccines to the citizens of Alaska and in my opinion the most important of all Alaskans, those mature Alaskans that want to regain our freedoms by having the choice to get our choice of vaccines and then be able to be out in the community and society. We have been told from the President of the United States on down, that this virus was the most deadly to seniors and to those with other medical issues that weaken the immunity of the person. We were told to hunker down, for our families to protect their parents and grandparents. This was done by those family members using social distancing, which meant no interaction with their parents/grandparents and society as a whole. We were told to wear masks, then not to, now to wear two! We were told a lot of things that our leaders from the President to Governor Dunleavy to Dr Zink and so many others asked us to do. Repeat asked, not mandated like those in New York, California, New Jersey, Anchorage, etc have and still are doing! Sadly, some of those things were not based on solid science and sadly over this past year have been moving targets. However, our leaders did the best they could based on the best information they were given. We can play 20/20 hindsight all day but by in large President Trump the Governors like Governor Dunleavy, Noeme from South Dakota, DeSantis of Florida, etc., took not only the information but ensured that the freedoms of our people were protected as much possible and any "restrictions" vs "mandates" were as little and short lasting as possible. We know the direction of this new President and it is not about freedom or freedom of choice. What with the direction of this new President, a Governor that values our freedoms is needed even more!

Look at what SB 56 does. It continues reducing the procurement time for the much needed logistical support items to get the vaccine out. Without it, the ability to have mass vaccinations throughout the State, such as the most recent in Anchorage and Palmer, would not have been possible.

Without it, is even questionable if we can continue getting the vaccine from the federal government, much less in the quantities we need, vs those Lower 48 States that would get the vaccines over our citizens! We can't forget that the ability to get the therapeutics would be gravely impacted. Look at the Lower 48. The media reports that several States like California and New York don't have enough beds. What is not being reported is that this is because they do not get out the much needed therapeutics to those hospitals, the State of Alaska does! Therapeutics are one of the major reasons we have such low death rates and long-term hospitalizations! One of the major ones has had a huge impact on especially seniors not being admitted to the hospital, Remedesovir, which is being used in a way that people once they are positive with the virus can get an infusion and not need a hospital bed! All that capability and more will be lost if SB 56 is not passed.

Not to mention all the rules and regulation that have been suspended and in so many cases we now see they are not needed. Senator Reinbold was chair of the committee to review rules and regs and to repeal them. If she had the knowledge that we now have as to the wastefulness of those rules she could have had a greater impact on all of our freedoms years ago!

In closing. The time frame of this bill is so that if unforeseen things come up that the Governor has the ability to use the tools to ensure that we are protected, without denying freedoms. If, as we all hope and expect, the vaccine, the therapeutics, the number of those already infected and now well, will drive the herd immunity levels to that 70% goal and thus the Governor may very well have the ability to end these emergency powers far sooner than September. This is not a means of denying our liberties and freedoms. Far from it! It is a reasoned approach to work a problem with the least impact on our freedoms, liberties, our economy and our very mental health as Alaskans. Alaska need not be like the Lower 48 or sadly even like Anchorage to rid ourselves of this virus. Alaska, all of Alaska can show the Lower 48 and the world, that we have the means and the determination to do this right! Please, vote yes on SB 56.

Mike Coons
President, Matsu Chapter, AMAC Action

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Jody Simpson

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 31, 2021 2:06 PM
To: Sen. David Wilson; Sen. Shelley Hughes
Subject: SB56

Please support and pass SB 56. Please notify the rest of your committee of this request.

sincerely,

Wayne Westberg
an Alaska senior and member of the Anchorage AMAC



ELECTRONIC MAIL

February 1, 2021

Senator David Wilson
State Capitol Room 121
Juneau AK, 99801
Senator.David.Wilson@akleg.gov

RE: ASHNHA Strongly Supports SB 56

Dear Senator Wilson,

The Alaska State Hospital & Nursing Home Association strongly supports SB 56, which extends the existing public health disaster emergency declaration issued by the Governor on January 15, 2021 to September 30, 2021.

SB 56 is vital to Alaska's health care system. In recognition of the present outbreak of COVID-19, and the credible threat of a greater, imminent outbreak from variant strains, the public health disaster emergency declaration in SB 56 allows Alaska's health care system to access (1) critical operational flexibilities at the federal level, and (2) key licensing and telehealth flexibilities at the state level.

If SB 56 is not passed, hospitals and nursing homes' compliance with federal requirements will be in question. This will place hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care providers into a position of great uncertainty, and potentially force a drastic curtailment of COVID operations.

Federal Flexibilities

Early in the pandemic, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued approximately 125 "blanket waivers" for 32 categories of health care services and provider types. Pursuant to section 1135 of the Social Security Act, the federal blanket waivers are automatically in effect for all states, and modify or set aside a variety of federal requirements that "pose issues or challenges for the health care delivery system." See *CMS Letter to Commissioner Crum, April 2, 2020*. These primarily affect requirements for individual facilities, such as hospitals, long term care facilities, and home health agencies. *Id.*

CMS' blanket waivers include the following language in 20 specific waiver flexibilities: "This waiver [or these flexibilities] may be implemented so long as it is not inconsistent with a state's emergency preparedness or pandemic plan." *CMS Fact Sheet*.

If the State no longer formally recognizes the existence of a public health disaster emergency in Alaska, then it is reasonable to believe that the CMS blanket waivers are "inconsistent with" the state's emergency preparedness or pandemic plan because, again, there is no longer an active "emergency" for which a plan is required.

If the blanket waivers are no longer available to Alaska health care facilities and providers, effects could include:

1. Closure of alternate care sites for screening and testing because there would be no waiver of provisions of the federal Emergency Medical Treatment & Labor Act (EMTALA) that allows screening of patients at locations offsite from a hospital campus.
2. Severe reduction in surge capacity and quarantine units because there would be no waiver of certain physical environment requirements under Medicare conditions of participation to allow for surge capacity and patient quarantine in facility and non-facility space.
3. Limitations on practitioners and health care workforce because there would be no waiver of requirements under 24 CFR §482 to allow use of practitioners to the fullest extent possible.

Not extending the emergency declaration also sends inconsistent signals to the public that an otherwise active pandemic is over and could compromise future funding opportunities from the federal government.

Finally, it should be noted that having an emergency declaration in place is customary with other states. As of last week, the National Governors Association reports that every state in the union has an active emergency declaration in place.

State Flexibilities

SB 56 also contains key provisions that provide flexibilities for professional and occupational licensing (Section 5), telemedicine and telehealth (Section 6), and fingerprinting (Section 7). If these state flexibilities are no longer available, the ability to increase staff quickly for a surge will be diminished. Additionally, the ability to deliver expanded services in rural Alaska through telehealth, especially for behavioral health, will be reduced with restrictive provider types and services.

Conclusion

SB 56 is critical for Alaska's health care system. ASHNHA strongly supports SB 56 and urges lawmakers to move with haste to pass the bill. After being on the frontlines of the pandemic for a year, the last thing hospitals and nursing homes need is more uncertainty on the ability to deliver health care. Thank you for your attention on this matter, and your partnership in solving this and the many other health care challenges facing Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Jared C. Kosin, J.D., M.B.A.
President & CEO

Cc Governor Dunleavy
Commissioner Adam Crum
Senate Health & Social Services Committee



February 2, 2021

Senator David Wilson, Chairman
Senate Health & Social Services Committee
State Capitol Building
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Senator Wilson,

We are writing today regarding SB 56 "An Act extending the January 15, 2021 governor's declaration of a public health disaster emergency in response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic;"

The Alaska Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Alliance supports SB 56. As front-line health care providers caring for Alaskans of all ages in hospitals, birthing centers, primary care clinics and surgical centers, we believe the bill includes two provisions that are necessary to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first is Section 2 of the bill, which extends the emergency declaration. The declaration is necessary to convey to the governor the powers granted in AS 26.23.020.

Specifically, the emergency declaration allows the governor to exercise the powers found in AS 26.23.020 subsection (g)(10), which is to "allocate or redistribute food, water, fuel, clothing, medicine or supplies;". It is the last two items, "medicine or supplies", that most directly affects us as frontline health care providers. This provision allows personal protective equipment and vaccine to be allocated and distributed to health care providers.

We believe it is also important to extend the powers granted in Section 5 of the bill, which deals with occupational licensing. Responding to the pandemic has stressed our health care system in ways we have not previously seen. In Alaska, the need for more providers is acute. Regulators must have the power to license new providers on an expedited basis.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony on SB 56. Please feel free to contact us any time if you have questions about our position on the bill, or other health care issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carrie Doyle DNP, APRN, ACNS-BC, CENP, CPHQ
President
AK APRN Alliance