



# Representative Ivy Spohnholz

Chair, House Ways and Means Committee

Co-Chair, House Labor and Commerce Committee

*Serving House District 16: College Gate, Russian Jack, Nunaka Valley, & Reflection Lake*

## **Sponsor Statement**

House Bill 265 v. D

*"An Act relating to telehealth; relating to the practice of medicine; relating to medical assistance coverage for services provided by telehealth; and providing for an effective date."*

The COVID-19 pandemic relaxed Alaska's telehealth laws and enabled broader access to behavioral health and specialty care, created cost-savings from reduced travel, and increased the convenience of high-quality health care to patients across the state. However, Alaskans have faced barriers to telehealth appointments due to regulatory hurdles across professions and inconsistent Medicaid coverage for services delivered via telehealth. Further, COVID-19 related flexibilities were regulatory suspensions and not permanent.

HB 265 maintains these pandemic-related telehealth flexibilities and expands Alaska Medicaid coverage of telehealth services in statute as follows.

- 1) Creates a new section on telehealth for all health care providers licensed with the State of Alaska that removes the requirement for an in-person visit and documentation of a barrier to an in-person visit prior to the delivery of telehealth.
- 2) Ensures telehealth availability for services related to opioid use disorder and controlled substances for certain providers.
- 3) Increases telehealth access for Alaska Medicaid beneficiaries by ensuring coverage for services for behavioral health, home and community-based services, rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers, and other programs eligible for Alaska Medicaid reimbursement. Ensures payment parity and Medicaid coverage for telehealth modalities (e.g., appointments over the Internet, phone, etc.).
- 4) There is no requirement to deliver services through telehealth, and both the provider and the patient may choose to limit or decline a telehealth encounter.

Comprehensive telehealth delivery has revolutionized health care in Alaska by creating another tool for providers to care for patients when they cannot physically be together. HB 265 will continue to modernize the state's health care system to the benefit of all Alaskans.

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