



Sponsor Statement

HB 52 No Patient Left Alone Act

"An Act relating to the right of patients to have a support person present during treatment and during stays at certain facilities; and relating to a requirement that health care facilities make certain information available to the public."

HB 52 seeks to safeguard a patient's right to a support person receiving emergency medical services, or staying at hospital, nursing facility, assisted living home, or hospice care. This bill ensures no patient is left alone when they feel most medically vulnerable and may not be withheld a support person based on a state or federal declaration of disaster, allows for civil penalties and requires healthcare facilities to make visitation policies available to the public.

The pandemic has caused great uncertainty and anxiety across Alaska and has significantly affected the medical community. Many unintended consequences have happened to patients because of visitation policies that have prohibited them from having any visitors, including a spouse, parent, close family member, guardian, health care agent, chaplain, or caregiver; and as a result, many have been forced to be alone during their treatment for serious conditions, traumas, illnesses, heart attacks, and routine and emergency surgeries.

Some of these patients have been forced to be alone for the entire course of their treatment and in some cases have died alone; and many families have been unable to be physically present with their loved ones while in a hospital, nursing home, hospice care, adult care home, special care unit, or residential treatment setting for mental illness, developmental or intellectual disability, or substance use disorder.

Alaskans have been limited to electronic video communications, if any, with the patient; and the patients who have been affected have included adults, minors, and individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities; however it is my belief that it is our moral obligation that these patients be allowed at least one support person of their choice to be physically present at reasonable times throughout the period of hospitalization or residential treatment.