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Alaska Native Health Board

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March 2, 2023

The Honorable Scott Kawasaki
Alaska Senate
Alaska State Capitol Room 119
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Senate Bill 16, Alaska Community Health Aide Appreciation Day

Dear Senator Kawasaki,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)[1] writes in support of Senate Bill 16 to proclaim September 10th as Alaska Community Health Aide Appreciation Day. The Alaska Community Health Aide Program (CHAP) serves as the backbone of the Alaska Tribal Health System.

The CHAP was developed in the 1960's in response to a number of health concerns, including: the tuberculosis epidemic, high infant mortality and high rates of injury in rural Alaska. In 1968, CHAP received formal recognition and congressional funding. The long history of cooperation and coordination between federal and state governments as well as Native tribal health organizations has facilitated improved health status in rural Alaska.

The program consists of a network of approximately 550 Community Health Aides/Practitioners (CHA/Ps) in over 170 rural Alaska villages. CHA/Ps work within the guidelines of the *Alaska Community Health Aide Manual* (CHAM) in assessing and providing emergent, acute, and chronic care to residents of their respective communities. Alaska CHA/Ps are the front line of healthcare in their communities. CHA/Ps are strongly connected to, respected, and essential members of their communities.

The Alaska CHAP Program has created an international model of a successful tribally-run health program. In Alaska, the program's success has expanded into community level therapists, including behavioral health and dental health. Nationally, it is authorized in federal statute[2]. The Indian Health Service has adopted the model to help deliver care in rural areas of the Lower 48, where providers are hard to recruit and retain.

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[1] ANHB was established in 1968 with the purpose of promoting the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. ANHB is the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues and is the advocacy organization for the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS), which is comprised of tribal health programs that serve all of the 229 Tribes and 180,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the state. As the statewide tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB helps Alaska's Tribes and Tribal programs achieve effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

[2] 25 U.S.C. § 1616l.

Our CHA/Ps have contributed to Alaska becoming a global model in the delivery of health care to rural communities around the world. Their commitment to serving their communities during the unprecedented pandemic, is a demonstration of the acknowledgement they deserve.

ANHB offers our full support for SB 16. If you have any comments or questions regarding our letter, please contact ANHB by email at anhb@anhb.org or by telephone at (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,



Chief William F. Smith, Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board
Tribally-Elected Leader of the Valdez Native Tribe

CC: Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee