

01/19/2023

Senate Health and Social Services Committee

Dear Honorable Senate HSS Committee Members,

I am writing to you as the CEO and owner of Orion Behavioral Health Network, a clinic that has expanded its services to meet the growing need for general behavioral health care in Alaska, particularly for children and adolescents. I am writing to express my support for SB115 and to discuss the current regulatory challenges we face, particularly in hiring and training Physician Assistants (PAs).

The existing regulations around hiring PAs involve cumbersome processes, including additional forms and approvals, which significantly delay our ability to hire qualified candidates. These bureaucratic hurdles not only hinder our hiring and training processes but also adversely affect patient access to timely care. We frequently encounter situations where patients' conditions worsen due to delayed access to treatment, a direct consequence of provider shortages exacerbated by these regulatory constraints.

At Orion Behavioral Health Network, we have extensive experience training PAs and have developed a high level of trust in their capabilities. PAs are an integral part of our team, working cohesively with our care teams to provide high-quality patient care. They are not independent entities within our structure; instead, they form a vital component of our collaborative approach to healthcare.

I understand that there is concern about the perceived independence that SB115 might grant to PAs. However, in the current Alaskan healthcare landscape, PAs can already establish practices in collaboration with physicians, much like hospitals and clinics do. Therefore, the notion of 'independence' as concerned by some in this bill is somewhat of a misnomer. PAs, regardless of the terminology used, work in tandem with other healthcare providers, contributing significantly to team-based patient care.

Furthermore, we are witnessing an alarming rate of burnout among healthcare providers due to the current shortage, which SB115 has the potential to help alleviate. The bill's intent is not to remove necessary practice oversight or enable bad practices; instead, it aims to streamline processes that currently serve as barriers to efficient healthcare delivery.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the committee to consider the positive implications of SB115, not only for healthcare providers but, more importantly, for the patients who stand to benefit from improved access to care. Removing unnecessary barriers while maintaining collaborative, team-based healthcare will significantly enhance our ability to serve the Alaskan community.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Dr. Arom Evans, MD