

Support Senate Bill 121 Emails

Batch #2 February 26, 2024

From: Brittany Karns <brittany.karns@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 8:26 AM

To: Rep. Jesse Sumner <Rep.Jesse.Sumner@akleg.gov>; Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>; AKPhA Executive Director <akpharmacistsassociation@gmail.com>; Sen. Scott Kawasaki <Sen.Scott.Kawasaki@akleg.gov>; Rep. Maxine Dibert <Rep.Maxine.Dibert@akleg.gov>

Subject: Re: Support for SB 121 / HB 226 – the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

February 21, 2024

Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate Majority Leader

Senator Scott Kawasaki

Representative Jesse Sumner

Representative Maxine Dibert

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Honorable Senator Giessel, Senator Kawasaki, Representative Sumner, and Representative Dibert,

I am writing to express my extreme support of SB 121 / HB 226 – The Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act. This bill protects patients' right to choose their own pharmacy, guards the patient-pharmacist relationship, and bars unfair trade practices that impact Alaskan pharmacies.

Alaskans should be free to choose their own pharmacy, but pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) take away that choice from our patients. PBMs decide which drugs are covered by insurance, how much is paid to the pharmacy, and which pharmacy the prescription can be filled. Vertically integrated PBMs own mail-order pharmacies – fiscally incentivizing them to gatekeep contracted pharmacies and funnel prescriptions to their own pharmacies. This has greatly impacted where Alaskans are “allowed” to fill their prescriptions and has hurt local brick and mortar pharmacies. These practices have resulted in many local pharmacies going out of business, leaving pharmacy deserts around the state, which affects patient safety. Because of Alaska's geographical location, mail-order can be problematic due to the long transit time and inclement weather, leading to medications becoming frozen, inappropriately thawed, and/or otherwise unsafe for use. Nothing in this legislation prohibits patients from using mail-order if they prefer to do so.

Research has shown that interaction with a pharmacist can increase medication safety and adherence. As one of the most trusted healthcare providers, the services we provide are valuable and our patients lose that if forced to fill at a mail-order pharmacy. It is important that our pharmacies stay in Alaskan communities and patients have access to pharmacists they have a trusting relationship with.

SB 121 / HB 226 offers protection to our local pharmacies by prohibiting PBMs from reimbursing our pharmacies less than what they would reimburse their own affiliated pharmacies. Furthermore, this bill requires PBMs to supply contracted pharmacies with a list of current medication prices, as well as prohibiting spread pricing. This

price transparency can help lower healthcare costs for patients and employee plan sponsors. The transparency provisions will help to ensure the most affordable and efficacious medications available are provided to patients.

I have patients - who are also my friends, neighbors, and part of my actual community that I actually live in, spend money in, and care about (as opposed to the PBM staff who live far away and never interact with the actual patients they impact) - literally every single day who say, I wanted to get this in town by my insurance only lets me get it from their mail-order pharmacy. I also have a specific friend who happens to be a pharmacy technician in Fairbanks. Her daughter had to receive institutionalized mental health care in the lower 48. To get her medications the PBM/insurance would only allow mail-order, and despite discussion they mistakenly shipped *from* the lower 48 to the mother in Fairbanks, who then had to repackage them and ship *to* her daughter in Utah. Fortunately this is a motivated mother who is healthcare literate and was able to drop everything to make this happen, but it created a ridiculous amount of run-around, therapy delay, and stress, when her daughter should have just been able to go to literally any pharmacy where she was to get her medication. After a number of weeks her daughter returned to Fairbanks but continues to be restricted to mail-order pharmacy when, as a pharmacy technician, mom should be able to get the medication at her work place or any other pharmacy of choice in town she so chooses instead of continually struggling with ordering through people far away and mail delays.

We need pharmacies in Alaska. For so many reasons. So that on the day you need a medication you can get it. So that when you have questions about your medication there is someone you can talk to, especially when it is a pen, an inhaler, or something with a device and you need an in-person demo. Sometimes youtube and telephone chats with someone far away just don't cut it. So that your medication isn't delayed, doesn't come frozen or heat-blasted. And so that the pharmacy staff taking care of you actually knows you and knows they are going to bump into you around town and have a relationship with you and do right by you. This bill makes it so that patients who need or want meds in town can get them and so that Alaskan owned, Alaskan staffed pharmacies can keep their doors open instead of driving everything and all the money with it out of state. Thank you for supporting this bill!

Respectfully,

Brittany Karns

Pharmacist in Fairbanks, AK (99701)

From: Darin Haugh <Darin.Haugh@tananachiefs.org>

Sent: Thursday, February 22, 2024 9:27 AM

To: Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>

Subject: Support for SB 121 / HB 226 – the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

February 22, 2024

Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate Majority Leader

Re: Support for SB 121 / HB 226 – the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

Dear Honorable Senator Giessel,

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Alaskans should be free to choose their own pharmacy, but pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) take away that choice from our patients. PBMs decide which drugs are covered by insurance, how much is paid to the pharmacy, and which pharmacy the prescription can be filled. Vertically integrated PBMs own mail-order pharmacies – fiscally incentivizing them to gatekeep contracted pharmacies and funnel prescriptions to their own pharmacies. This has greatly impacted where Alaskans are “allowed” to fill their prescriptions and has hurt local brick and mortar pharmacies. These practices have resulted in many local pharmacies going out of business, leaving pharmacy deserts around the state, which affects patient safety. Because of Alaska’s geographical location, mail-order can be problematic due to the long transit time and inclement weather, leading to medications becoming frozen, inappropriately thawed, and/or otherwise unsafe for use.

Nothing in this legislation prohibits patients from using mail-order if they prefer to do so.

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Respectfully,



Darin Haugh, Pharm.D.

Pharmacist at Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center |Tanana Chiefs Conference

Phone: 907.459.3807 www.tananachiefs.org

1717 W. Cowles Street, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

“Healthy People Across Generations”

From: Samantha J. Ervin <Samantha.Ervin@tananachiefs.org>

Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 2:35 PM

To: Rep. Jesse Sumner <Rep.Jesse.Sumner@akleg.gov>; Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>; Sen. Click Bishop <Sen.Click.Bishop@akleg.gov>; Rep. Mike Cronk <Rep.Mike.Cronk@akleg.gov>

Cc: akpharmacistsassociation@gmail.com

Subject: SB121/HB226

February 21, 2024

Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate Majority Leader

Representative Jesse Sumner

Alaska State Legislature

Senator Click Bishop

Representative Mike Cronk

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support for SB 121 / HB 226 – the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

Dear Honorable Senator Giessel, Representative Sumner, Senator Bishop, and Representative Cronk,

I am pleased to offer our support for SB 121 / HB 226 – The *Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act*. This bill protects patients' right to choose their own pharmacy, guards the patient-pharmacist relationship, and bars unfair trade practices that impact Alaskan pharmacies.

Alaskans should be free to choose their own pharmacy, but pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) take away that choice from our patients. PBMs decide which drugs are covered by insurance, how much is paid to the pharmacy, and which pharmacy the prescription can be filled. Vertically integrated PBMs own mail-order pharmacies – fiscally incentivizing them to gatekeep contracted pharmacies and funnel prescriptions to their own pharmacies. This has greatly impacted where Alaskans are “allowed” to fill their prescriptions and has hurt local pharmacies. These practices have resulted in many local pharmacies going out of business, leaving pharmacy deserts around the state, which affects patient safety. Because of Alaska's geographical location, mail-order can be problematic due to the long transit time and inclement weather, leading to medications becoming frozen, inappropriately thawed, and/or otherwise unsafe for use. Nothing in this legislation prohibits patients from using mail-order if they prefer to do so.

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Lastly, the number of independent pharmacies in Alaska has decrease by 25% in less than 6 years. SB 121 / HB 226 offers protection to our local pharmacies by prohibiting PBMs from reimbursing our pharmacies less than what they would reimburse their own affiliated pharmacies. Furthermore, this bill requires PBMs to supply contracted pharmacies with a list of current medication prices, as well as prohibiting spread pricing. This price transparency

can help lower healthcare costs for patients and employee plan sponsors. The transparency provisions will help to ensure the most affordable and efficacious medications available are provided to patients.

I am a high school graduate of Walter Northway School and completed a Doctor of Pharmacy degree out-of-state at the University of New Mexico. My dream was to come back to the Upper Tanana Area of Alaska to improve and increase access to health care. PBM practices are a threat to the access to health in our area and many areas of Alaska. We are the first opened pharmacy in the Upper Tanana Area and many community members express their gratitude of not having to travel hours in sometimes sub-zero temperatures to pick up their prescriptions. The closest pharmacy to us had previously been in Delta Junction or Glennallen and our community would very much appreciate any support to ensure our pharmacy stays open.

I have witnessed many issues with mail order pharmacies which impact a patient's health care. I will often get phone calls from patients on medications not arriving on time for critical therapy and we will have to "bridge" their medication to prevent a lapse in therapy. These "bridges" are not often covered by their insurance plans because technically they are considered "early refills". Sometimes we have to spend hours on the phone to even talk to a representative of the insurance company to get medications covered for patients. There are times when mail order pharmacies refuse to mail refrigerated drugs, so the patient will have to use our pharmacy to fill these drugs and will be charged a co-pay higher than they would if they were using the mail-order pharmacy. I've had patients come in with a huge bag of medications which they are no longer taking and telling me that the mail-order pharmacy "just keep sending them". After ensuring that these medications are discontinued by their providers, it takes a lot of time navigating their automated phone systems trying to get through to a person who can help go over which medications should be discontinued and which should remain. Patients using these mail-order pharmacies would often times come to me to show them how to appropriately assemble and use their inhalers, injectors, etc. My time showing them how to assemble and use their medications appropriately is not compensated as all the business aspects and payment went to the mail-order pharmacies.

This bill will help us, as a local pharmacy, ensure that this increase to health care remains for patients who choose to use us as a pharmacy. We have a large aging, limited-income population in Tok and surrounding areas, many of whom would rather use us as a pharmacy but just cannot afford the extra co-payment that the insurances require them to pay to use us and not the PMB owned mail-order pharmacies. There are also many patients who prefer using mail order pharmacies and this bill will not affect them as it will be their choice to do so. I live locally here in Tok and have gotten to know many community members and care deeply for their wellbeing. PBM practices are closing many Alaskan pharmacies and this will be detrimental to Alaskans ESPECIALLY those who choose to live in rural places such as Tok and surrounding areas.

Tsii'ni (Thank you) respectfully,

Sam Ervin



Samantha Ervin, PharmD, BCACP

Upper Tanana Health Center Pharmacy

Pharmacist | Tanana Chiefs Conference

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124.4 Tok Cutoff, Tok, AK 99780

"Healthy People Across Generations"

From: Desiree Molina <dmolina60590@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 12:53 PM

To: Rep. Jesse Sumner <Rep.Jesse.Sumner@akleg.gov>; Rep. DeLena Johnson <Rep.DeLena.Johnson@akleg.gov>; Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>; Sen. Shelley Hughes <sen.shelley.hughes@akleg.gov>

Subject: Support for SB 121 / HB 226 – the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

Dear Honorable Senator Giessel and Representative Sumner,

I am pleased to offer my support for SB 121 / HB 226 – The Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act. This bill protects patients' right to choose their own pharmacy, guards the patient-pharmacist relationship, and bars unfair trade practices that impact Alaskan pharmacies.

Alaskans should be free to choose their own pharmacy, but pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) take away that choice from our patients. PBMs decide which drugs are covered by insurance, how much is paid to the pharmacy, and which pharmacy the prescription can be filled. Vertically integrated PBMs own mail-order pharmacies – fiscally incentivizing them to gatekeep contracted pharmacies and funnel prescriptions to their own pharmacies

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Respectfully,

Desiree Molina, MBA

PharmD Candidate 2024

AKPhA Intern 2023-2024

From: Chong, Christopher <CChong@SouthcentralFoundation.com>

Sent: Wednesday, February 21, 2024 8:42 AM

To: Rep. Jesse Sumner <Rep.Jesse.Sumner@akleg.gov>; Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>

Cc: AKPhA Executive Director <akpharmacistsassociation@gmail.com>

Subject: Support for SB 121/HB 226– the Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

Dear Honorable Senator Giessel and Representative Sumner,

I am pleased to offer my full support for SB 121 / HB 226 – The *Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act*. This bill protects patients' right to choose their own pharmacy, guards the patient-pharmacist relationship, and bars unfair trade practices that impact Alaskan pharmacies. Alaskans should be free to choose their own pharmacy, but pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) take away that choice from our patients. PBMs decide which drugs are covered by insurance, how much is paid to the pharmacy, and which pharmacy the prescription can be filled.

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As a clinical pharmacist working in a primary care clinic in Wasilla, I have witnessed the personal struggles and challenges of patients navigating PBMs to obtain their medications. I worked with a patient with Hepatitis C who initially received a 4 week supply out of an 8-week supply through his PBM specialty mail order pharmacy, but then due to an insurance contract change, the PBM would not cover his refill to complete treatment which would have cost the patient \$>10,000. After speaking for several hours with the PBM representative and ultimately the manager, I was able to convince the PBM manager to cover the patient’s Hepatitis C medication after explaining the dangers and risks of stopping treatment midway, potentially resulting in viral resistance and treatment failure. Another example was working with a pediatric patient with Hepatitis C. Due to the medication being considered “specialty”, our pharmacy’s local supplier was not able to order the medication, nor could any other local pharmacies in Wasilla, Palmer, and Anchorage. The patient was essentially forced to use a PBM specialty mail order pharmacy. The specialty pharmacy delayed the patient’s shipment of her medication due to “insurance issues”; however, when I requested to speak with the pharmacist on staff to address these issues, my requests were denied. After two months of attempting to address the PBM’s insurance questions and issues, I was able to find a different specialty pharmacy. The patient received her medication and has now been cured of Hepatitis C.

Research has shown that interaction with a pharmacist can increase medication safety and adherence. As one of the most trusted healthcare providers, the services we provide are valuable, and our patients lose that if forced to fill at a mail-order pharmacy. It is important that our pharmacies stay in Alaskan communities and patients have access to pharmacists they have a trusting relationship with.

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I am requesting your support for our patients’ right to choose their own pharmacies and increase access to quality care in Alaska.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very respectfully,

Chris

Christopher Chong, Pharm.D., MBA-HM, BCPS, AE-C

Senior Pharmacist | Integrated Clinical Pharmacist, Primary Care East

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