

March 12, 2024

Chair Tobin and members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Margaret Barnett, and I have been a Nurse Practitioner with the Alaska Heart and Vascular Institute for the last 28 years, in Anchorage, Alaska. I am the current American College of Cardiology (ACC) Cardiovascular Team Representative (CVTR) for the state of Alaska, Co-Chair of the ACC National CVTR members section, and member of the ACC Leadership Section CVT Council.

Today, I am writing in support of Senate Bill 221, introduced by Senator Gray-Jackson, which will require the Department of Education to create Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) education for schools across Alaska.

Early bystander CPR/immediate CPR can double or triple a victim's chance of survival from cardiac arrest. Prompt delivery of a shock with a defibrillator and CPR within 3-5 min of collapse can produce survival rates as high as 49-75%. In many urban communities, the time interval from EMS call to EMS arrival is 7-8 minutes, even longer in rural and remote areas. This means that in the first minutes after a victim collapses, the bystander will play a pivotal role in performing CPR and patient outcomes. Successful rescuer actions at the scene of a cardiac arrest are of extreme importance and time is critical. For every minute without CPR, survival from witnessed VF cardiac arrest decreases by 7-10%. When bystander CPR happens, the decrease in survival is more gradual and averages 3-4% per minute.

Over 365,000 cardiac arrests occur each year in the United States, with the largest majority occurring at home, yet family members or bystanders perform CPR in only 40% of these situations. Many people are afraid to perform CPR for fear of causing further damage, although most states, including Alaska, have Good Samaritan laws that protect people who volunteer to offer help in an emergency. In addition, most bystanders report they did not know how to perform CPR.

The majority of states in the U.S. have mandatory CPR training in their school curriculum. Alaska is one of only seven states that does not. Resources for CPR training are widely available and cost-effective in our community. Hands-only CPR can be taught in as little as 30 minutes and CPR certification courses can be completed in under 3-4 hours. Numerous training centers, resources, and additional information are available through local fire departments, volunteer organizations, professionals, and the American Heart Association. I have personally volunteered my time and have taught hands-only CPR to local Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts for several years. Our local ACC chapter is volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club to teach hands-only CPR in several villages in Alaska this summer.

Bystander CPR can save lives, improve outcomes for victims of cardiac arrests, and teach our children valuable life skills.

I respectfully ask this committee to pass Senate Bill 221 promptly and thank you for considering this critical issue. If I can be of any further assistance to this committee, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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