

March 20, 2024

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senate Majority Leader
Representative Jesse Sumner
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Support for SB121/HB226 – Patient Freedom of Pharmacy Choice Act

I'd like to express my support for Senate Bill 121/ House Bill 226 and share my personal history receiving services from a PBM.

I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis (UC) in 2016 and began treatment with Humira. Humira worked very well and put my UC into remission. Humira is considered a specialty medication and my health insurance insisted it be mailed from a specialty pharmacy. I received Humira shipped from the West Coast to Alaska, and it typically arrived within 24 hours. My employer changed health insurance providers a few years later and I changed to GEHA. GEHA contracts with CVS Specialty Pharmacy for specialty medications. The shipment location changed from the West Coast to the East Coast, frequently shipping the medication from Pennsylvania. The Humira shipments immediately started having issues reaching Alaska. I contacted both GEHA & CVS repeatedly regarding the shipments with no improvement on consistency and timeliness of delivery. CVS sent my last Humira shipment to Kansas instead of Alaska. Despite multiple calls, they would not send a shipment to me until they were able to track down the first shipment and get it back, nor was I allowed to get the medication locally. It was almost 2 weeks until I was able to receive the new Humira and when I used it I had a massive reaction because I had gone too long without the medication. This has caused me years of physical, emotional, and financial distress; multiple medical and emergency visits and seeing specialists out-of-state at my own expense. I am now unable to use Humira because CVS refused to send me a medication I desperately needed in a timely manner, that they wouldn't allow me to fill locally.

Since this initial incident, I've gone through most available UC medications, including Entyvio, Stelara, and Remicade with limited to no success. Early in 2023 I was changed to Rinvoq by my gastroenterologist, and it is currently working well. There are very few medications currently left to treat UC that I haven't tried.

Unfortunately, GEHA/CVS was unable to ship the Rinvoq to me in a timely manner. The first two occasions they approved getting the Rinvoq locally as their shipments didn't reach me in time. The local pharmacy had to order and pay for the medication before it was approved by CVS to ensure I didn't go without. A storm on the East Coast made CVS unable to mail one shipment at all. After the first two fills, GEHA & CVS did not approve my receiving the medication locally, even if they were unable to provide it. My gastroenterologist, local pharmacy and myself are doing everything we can to make sure Rinvoq works; by using strong steroids and other

medications; working from home due to the additional medications further compromising my immune system; and stocking Rinvoq locally to ensure availability. It is extremely important that I receive the Rinvoq in a timely manner with no lapses.

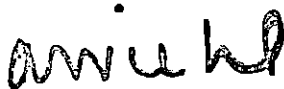
Having medication mandatorily shipped across the United States for corporate gain was nearly a death sentence for me and if my local pharmacy hadn't stocked the medication for me without payment I may not be here.

Ulcerative Colitis is typically a young person's disease. I developed this disease later in life and have worked and been medically insured my whole life. I feel obligated to tell my story. Similar stories are left untold by those who didn't survive the lack of medication or choice imposed upon them by their insurance or specialty pharmacy.

I urge you to pass the Pharmacy Choice Act for your family members, friends, and neighbors. Please don't leave us unprotected with no choice, no hope and financially traumatized by wealthy corporations as they cut off local timely access to medications.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ardis wiehl". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Ardis Wiehl
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907-328-9394