

March 13, 2024

The Honorable Jesse Bjorkman
Senate Labor & Commerce
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, 120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Support for SB 219, Alaska Gold Card Legislation

Chair Bjorkman,

On behalf of the Denali Oncology Group (DOG) and the Community Oncology Alliance (COA), we write to express our strong support for Senate Bill 219, legislation that would mark a significant step toward improving health care delivery for Alaskans living with cancer.

DOG is an organization whose primary mission is to promote, plan, support, represent, advocate for, and conduct educational, and scientific activities to facilitate improvements in the practice of oncology and the delivery of care to patients for the benefit of the citizens and residents of the State of Alaska. COA is the only nonprofit organization in the United States dedicated solely to independent community oncology practices, which serve the majority of Americans receiving treatment for cancer.

Despite our members efforts to deliver affordable, high-quality cancer care, their patients continue to encounter treatment barriers due to overly rigorous insurer prior authorization requirements. Instead of ensuring appropriate treatment and minimizing waste, insurers, and pharmacy benefit managers, are using prior authorizations, step therapies, and other utilization management strategies to slow down the treatment process in the name of cost-control. As a result, utilization review has developed into a constant bureaucratic hurdle for many oncology practices, often delaying or outright denying essential treatments for patients.

SB 219 prescribes a solution for these challenges by introducing the concept of a "gold card," which grants exemptions to healthcare providers who consistently following evidence-based medical practices. Under the bill, providers who achieve an 80% approval rate for prior authorization requests, are awarded gold card status for their services, valid for a duration of 12 months. This would considerably alleviate delays in care and improve patient access to life-saving treatment.

DOG, COA, and our members, are committed to ensuring providers are better able to dedicate their time to patients. That is why we strongly urge the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee to pass SB 219 and help our members provide Alaskans with timely access to care. If you have any follow up questions or would like assistance on any policy issue involving prior authorization or oncology, please contact COA director of state regulation and policy, James Lee at jlee@coacancer.org.

Sincerely,

Tammy Thiel
Executive Director
Denali Oncology Group

James Lee
Director, State Regulation & Policy
Community Oncology Alliance