

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 6, 2024

3:33 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator David Wilson, Chair  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Senator Cathy Giessel

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator James Kaufman, Vice Chair  
Senator Löki Tobin

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 115

"An Act relating to physician assistants; relating to physicians; and relating to health care insurance policies."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 115

SHORT TITLE: PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCOPE OF PRACTICE

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) TOBIN BY REQUEST

03/27/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/27/23	(S)	HSS, L&C
01/23/24	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
01/23/24	(S)	Heard & Held
01/23/24	(S)	MINUTE(HSS)
02/06/24	(S)	HSS AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JULIA FONOV, Staff  
Senator David Wilson  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a summary of changes for SB 115.

MACKENZIE POPE, Staff

Senator Löki Tobin  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a statement on behalf of Senator Tobin, sponsor of SB 115.

NOAH SHIELDS, Chair  
Board of Marital and Family Therapy  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions pertaining to SB 115.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[3:33:29 PM](#)

**CHAIR DAVID WILSON** called the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Dunbar, Giessel, and Chair Wilson.

#### **SB 115-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

[3:33:55 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 115 "An Act relating to physician assistants; relating to physicians; and relating to health care insurance policies."

[3:34:06 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON stated the committee would consider a committee substitute.

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At ease

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CHAIR WILSON reconvened the meeting.

CHAIR WILSON moved to adopt the committee substitute (CS) for SB 115, work order 33-LS0542\S, as the working document.

[3:34:35 PM](#)

SENATOR GIESSEL objected for purposes of discussion.

[3:34:49 PM](#)

JULIA FONOV, Staff, Senator David Wilson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a summary of changes for SB 115, version B to S, as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Work Draft for CS for Senate Bill 115 (HSS) contains additions that the Board of Marital and Family Therapy approved and recommended to update AS 8.63, Board of Marital and Family Therapy, regarding Marital and Family Therapy licenses to practice.

These changes were reviewed by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development and they have expressed their support for this committee substitute.

Page 1, Line 1, following "Act" inserts: "relating to marital and family therapists;"

And then this committee substitute inserts 5 new sections and inserts changes to physician assistant definitions.

Page 1, following line 3, inserts Section 1:

- Removes courses so that required instruction is just defined by the number of semesters or quarter hours needed.
- Removes the word "one year" so that supervised clinical practice requirements are defined by nine semester or 12 quarter hours.
- Allows supervision to be in Alaska or another jurisdiction.
- Creates a new subsection that the 100 hours of individual supervision must be approved by the board.
- Creates a new subsection that the 100 hours of group supervision can be either individual or a combination of group supervision hours.

Page 2, line 30, inserts Section 2:

- Removes the word courses and replaces it with "course work"

Page 3, line 7, inserts Section 3:

- Amends the expiration for supervised practice licenses so they may be extended because of extenuating circumstances at the discretion of the board.

Page 3, line 11, inserts Section 4:

- Amends the definition of "supervision" to remove the requirement for it to be "face-to-face" and instead require it to be "synchronous"; and to update audio and video tapes to be audio and video recordings.

Page 3, line 16:

- Renames "Section 1" to "Section 5" and it renumbers the following bill sections accordingly.

Page 3, line 17:

- The word "Regulation" is removed and replaced with "Licensure and scope of practice" for physician assistants.

- Page 3, line 23, inserts the word "in this section"
- Page 3, line 24 removes the word "the" and replaces it with "a"

Page 4, line 23:

- Replaces 2,000 hours with 4,000 hours for physician assistants who may only practice under a collaborative agreement.

Page 5, line 22:

- Remove "Under the supervision, control, and responsibility of either a physician licensed under this chapter or a physician exempted from licensing under AS 08.64.370" and replace it with "as authorized in AS 08.64.107"

Page 6, line 2:

- Insert "physician assistant" into the definition of "practitioner"

Page 6, line 25:

- Regarding what a health insurance policy may not contain, this inserts "(4) imposes a practice, education, or collaboration requirement on physician assistants that is inconsistent with or more restrictive than the requirements imposed under AS 08.64.107 or a regulation adopted by the State Medical Board"

Page 7, line 18 inserts Section 12

- Removes advanced practice registered nurses from those eligible to provide group supervision, which the board states is due to the limited amount of psychology education in their program
- Eliminates temporary licenses for marital and family therapists. The board states temporary licenses were created to fill a gap in those individuals who had completed the supervision and practice hours of licensure but were waiting for a licensing exam date. Now there are multiple licensing exam dates throughout the year and Marriage and Family Therapist Associates can take the licensing exam at any time they are accruing hours, making the need for temporary licenses outdated.
- Eliminates the definition of "courses" so requirements are defined by the number of semester or quarter hours needed. The current statute appears that meeting the number of courses is sufficient, even if semester or quarter hours are not. Leaving this term in statute may confuse applicants who may want to use courses that are under 3 credits, but have enough of those courses to meet the requirements under each category.

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MACKENZIE POPE, Staff, Senator Löki Tobin, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a statement on behalf of Senator Tobin, sponsor of SB 115. She stated Senator Tobin does not agree with the repeal of AS 08.63.120(b)(2)(D) that relates to nurse practitioners and therefore would not support the committee substitute. She asked why the Board of Marital and Family Therapy sought its repeal.

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NOAH SHIELDS, Chair, Board of Marital and Family Therapy, Kenai, Alaska, replied that advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs), though highly qualified in their profession, lack the educational course work to oversee marriage and family therapists (MFTs) when compared to other professions that meet or exceed the requirements. He provided examples of standards of practice that are different between the two professions. He stated the repeal does not keep Marital and Family therapists from working under or with ANPs. It ensures Marital and Family Therapy associates are working towards licensure and receive appropriate supervision to uphold clinical practice standards while integrating with other professions.

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SENATOR DUNBAR said SB 115 would essentially become another bill through the changes in the committee substitute. He stated that although a summary of changes was provided, a practical presentation regarding what the changes accomplish hasn't been offered. He asked for a description of what the bill does and what it means to the medical providers that it involves.

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MR. SHIELDS replied that a lot of the provisions that are recommended update language, for example replacing "face-to-face" with "synchronous." Other changes would make understanding requirements easier, for example "courses" can be worth different credit hours. He opined that clarifying language would reduce the amount of time the board and staff must spend helping people understand the requirements.

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SENATOR DUNBAR said the changes to improve and modernize language seem relatively uncontroversial and perhaps popular, except for the provision that restricts the work of ANPs. He asked whether the Board of Marital and Family Therapist would support the committee substitute if Section 12 were removed to avoid controversy.

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MR. SHIELDS replied absolutely. Any of the changes would be positive for those licensed under AS 08. He reiterated that ANP are not being limited, rather it is about where MFT associates will obtain their group supervision hours. He noted that the required 200 hours can be acquired through group or individual supervision. It is imperative that supervisors have the training necessary to ensure that the professionals under the chapter are practicing ethically and at MTF standards that may be different from other professions.

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CHAIR WILSON stated the Department of Commerce provided a comparison of requirements by licensure types. He stated ANP requirements aligned more with the requirements of a social worker than a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC).

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SENATOR GIESSEL questioned why the changes were inserted into a clean bill instead of creating a separate bill.

[3:51:02 PM](#)

MR. SHIELDS stated it was his first time going through the process. After reaching out to legislators, who connected him to Senator Wilson's office, where they informed him that a solution was to include the changes in SB 115.

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CHAIR WILSON stated the changes were made in consultation with the sponsor of SB 115. He stated his office worked with the Department of Commerce to make sure the changes were benign and aligned with other licensure types.

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At ease

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CHAIR WILSON reconvened the meeting and asked if there were further questions.

[3:54:50 PM](#)

CHAIR WILSON withdrew his motion to adopt CSSB 115. There being no objection, the motion was withdrawn. SB 115 was before the committee.

CHAIR WILSON said that further discussion with the bill sponsor is needed prior to making changes to the bill.

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CHAIR WILSON [held SB 115 in committee.]

[3:55:39 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Wilson adjourned the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting at 3:55 p.m.