

HB

256

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE - HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE MIKE BEIRNE

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JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811

13 May 1975

Representative Tim Wallis
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Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Rep. Wallis:

You were interested in having some of my comments on House Bill 256, with particular reference as to how physicians were licensed in our state as contrasted to dentists.

Really, the issue as I see it, is the ease with which a licensure takes place for physicians, and the difficulties encountered in getting a dentist licensed.

Lets take a physician first and I will explain to you how it works. A physician comes from any medical school in the United States, and he can also come from Canada and England and some other foreign countries. All he has to have is a license in another state and have good references so that we know he is not a kook, and we can license him on the same day he arrives in the state. I have done it many times. We license physicians by endorsement. We don't use reciprocity, obviously, since we don't have any medical schools or dental schools to reciprocate with.

But any physician, or all physicians in the United States, can be licensed in Alaska simply, quickly, and easily. It is extremely rare for one to be turned down. Probably 95% of the applicants are licensed without difficulty. This encourages physicians to come into the state. We don't care who they work for, whether they work for themselves, for non-profit corporations, for the Teamsters, for the Sisters, for the local governments, or for the state. It's all the same.

The Medical Examining Board has a member in the big cities around the state and the applicant has to have an interview with the board member who grants him a temporary license and then the paper work is finished up in the routine manner by the Department of Commerce.

The Dental Board of course does not work the same way. Dentists are not licensed by endorsement. They are licensed only by examination. When a physician takes an examination, he has to go outside to a University and take the exam there, or take a National Exam, because it is much better than the local doctors trying to come up with a written exam for him.

The dentists only give their examination once each year. Quite a few of the applicants are screened out before they are permitted to take the exam. Of those who are permitted to take the exam, my understanding is that about half of them pass it. There is no way possible for a dentist to take the written exam, or the practical exam that they give him, at an outside University, or to take it from a disinterested third party.

What I would recommend, is any changes that are going to be made, be that dentists that are licensed in Washington, Oregon, and California now be permitted to practise in Alaska by licensing them on endorsement. For example if 100 dentists graduate from the University of California in June, everyone of them should be qualified to practise dentistry in Alaska, and should be able to get a license up here by endorsement, simply by presenting their graduation certificate from the dental school, letters of reference regarding character and professional ability, and their California license.

The dentists have testified at the HESS meeting that East Coast dentistry is inferior. Of course I don't believe this. I came from Pennsylvania and I think the University of Pennsylvania has as good a dental school as exists in the United States. The same with New York. The same with all the states back there. The schools are good. The dentists have said that the West Coast schools are good. Okay lets license them all by endorsement. I don't see any need to go through this far-out examination they chose. Also the bill should provide that examination of dentists for licensure in our state can be conducted by outside Universities or dental schools. There are also those exams, written and practical, theoretical and technical, could be made available to the Board of Examiners.

The Board of Examiners of the Dental Board, just like the Board of Examiners of any professional board, should include at least one non-professional person so that the public has some more to say about licensure of the professional peoples. I think that Senator Croft has a bill in the Senate which would put a lay person on the Board of the Bar Examiners.

The only reason that Nome has three doctors now at the Norton Sound Health Corporation, which I visited last winter, is because it is easy to get physicians to come to Alaska. They can get licensed here easily. But you can't get a dentist licensed easily, and that means you can't get them to go to Nome, or Kotzebue, or Barrow, or any place else in the state, without planning ahead for a long time and then having the Dental Board decide how many dentists are going to practise in the state. I will be the first to admit that bringing in more dentists may make it harder on the private practitioners who are here. But I think the duty is to the consumers, and not to the providers.

If the Natives were operating a Health Center they should be able to hire the dentist, and put him on the Health Center payroll as an employee, just like everybody else. For three years I've operated a Health Clinic in Anchorage, called the Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center. It was under a Federal grant. We had five physicians working in that clinic over the years, and there are two working there now. I am no longer associated with the Center. But we had no trouble getting physicians because we could get them licensed so quickly and easily. But we could never get a dentist. We wanted a dental program, and our consumers needed it, but there was no way we could give it to them. We were able to hire physicians for \$35,000 a year who were good physicians and competent to do the job that needed to be done. It was easy to get physicians from the Public Health Service and from the military, because they knew it only took a day to get licensed if they wanted to enter private practise here. But the dentists had to plan ahead at least a year, and the young guys in the service just don't plan ahead that far.

I certainly think dentistry is important. And I think that the quality of dentistry is very important. But certainly no more important than medicine. Quality is true because physicians are generally controlled through hospital staffs, so that they can not do certain procedures in the hospitals unless they are fully qualified, none the less a physician who just operates an office practise and doesn't utilize the hospital still takes care of peoples lives everyday. He takes care of the whole person. We want the quality of both medicine and dentistry to be high, but I can not see how it would be lowered by licensing everyone who graduated this year from the University of California Dental School.

One should also remember that the army and the Public Health Service send dentists and physicians all over the state, and they don't meet any state licensing laws. They don't have to. But the Public Health Service Dentist who is practising in Kotzebue is discharged from the service and the next day he can not practise on those same people because he can not get a license in this state. That just doesn't make any sense to me.

The Board of Examinors of any profession is given their special position for the purposes of protecting the public from poor quality practisioners. They are not given the power to regulate the numbers who practise in the profession. Everybody who is qualified to practise in the profession, and who applies for a license, must be licensed. I am sure the Legislature did not intend the professions to control the number of practitioners who practise in the state arbitrarily. I know the Bar Association

does this, but we don't seem to have much control over them. But putting lay people on the Bar or Board I'm sure would help alot too.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in providing other ideas let me know.

Sincerely yours ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Beirne".

Mike Beirne



STATEMENT BY THE ALASKA DENTAL SOCIETY

HB #256

There are several pre-existing facts that must be considered in contemplating a bill that so vitally affects the dental care available to Alaskans. They are as follows:

- 1) The dental act and examining board exists to determine and maintain a good quality of professional competency.
- 2) Reciprocity is by definition a two-way agreement. In 1956 the dental board offered reciprocal rights to every state and only New Hampshire accepted. The states most likely to feel positive toward such an agreement, Washington and Oregon declined because they felt it would allow an exodus from Alaska. . . not enough to be noticeable below, but a significant loss to Alaska. Much work is being done with reciprocity, but it can not be considered "safe" at this time until the level of dental education is more standardized, and all state dental boards cease giving favored treatment or, worse, rubber stamping licenses to graduates of the school(s) of their respective states.
- 3) The permit system was included in the dental act many years ago to answer a unique need for outlying areas in acquiring dentists. It allows for a community to acquire a dentist without delay, and yet maintains the quality control. The board can issue a permit upon being satisfied the applicant meets certain requirements as set forth and then requires the granted permittee to take the next board exam.

Anything that will open holes in this basic quality control system would be disastrous to the unsuspecting public. This bill will gut the existing dental act to the detriment of the public, not the dentist.



Now enters HB #256 during Health & Social Services committee hearings. the author states that the natives are setting up health care organizations and require this legislation in order to proceed with setting up clinics and negotiating with potential dentist employees. He also states they have had no problem with the existing statutes to date!

The author also vividly describes the tragic type of care received by some of the villagers where teeth are extracted on a wholesale basis and no follow-up care provided! Yet this type of "service" is performed by that single group of dentists that are not subject to board control--the public health service dentist.

The Alaska Dental Society has been working hard and effectively in trying to do away with just this type of thing. It has brought about more comprehensive care being offered, more care to adults, preventive care, and a significant amount of contract care by private Alaska dentists. A top level American Dental Association Committee was brought to Alaska at the Alaska Dental Society's request to review the level and type of care received by Alaska natives and they made recommendations to the Indian Health Service in 1974.

There has been a vast improvement in a short time. There is much more to be done and yet progress to date is significant considering the wheels that must be turned and bureaucratic changes required.

This bill will allow more dentists to come in without consideration for quality and do it within the natives own organization! This would be an increase in the problem and a condition I'm sure they would not want to occur. The natives can least afford to perpetuate the double level dental care. They have suffered enough!



If, in fact, other people or groups such as the Teamsters or chain dental groups desire this legislation to enable them to serve their personal needs, the same question must be raised. Do you want to take this high risk approach in order to satisfy their immediate needs? A significant percent of those taking the Alaska Board Exam failed, thereby protecting the public. With a mandatory open door for permits, or open reciprocity this same percent of Board failures would be practicing on your friends and maybe family!

The Alaska dentists are truly dedicated to providing good care for all Alaskans and remain willing to work with any group toward solving their dental care problems. They are equally dedicated to their responsibility in maintaining a good level of care. They feel this bill would undermine and destroy the very principle that established the Dental Act and Board. As new needs require changes, Alaska dentists want to work to allow these changes to come to pass in the manner that will maintain the maximum public benefit.