



February 13, 2024

The Honorable Lyman Hoffman
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 516
Juneau AK, 99801
Senator.Lyman.Hoffman@akleg.gov

The Honorable Donald Olson
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 508
Juneau AK, 99801
Senator.Donald.Olson@akleg.gov

The Honorable Bert Stedman
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol Room 518
Juneau AK, 99801
Senator.Bert.Stedman@akleg.gov

RE: ATA ACTION SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 91

Dear Co-Chairs Hoffman, Olson and Stedman and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of ATA Action, I am writing to you to comment in support of Senate Bill 91.

ATA Action, the American Telemedicine Association's affiliated trade association focused on advocacy, advances policy to ensure all individuals have permanent access to telehealth services across the care continuum. ATA Action supports the enactment of state and federal telehealth coverage and fair payment policies to secure telehealth access for all Americans, including those in rural and underserved communities. ATA Action recognizes that telehealth and virtual care have the potential to truly transform the health care delivery system – by improving patient outcomes, enhancing safety and effectiveness of care, addressing health disparities, and reducing costs – if only allowed to flourish.

Senate Bill 91 acts as a rational expansion of Alaska's telehealth policy and further builds upon the comprehensive telehealth policy change enacted by House Bill 265 two years ago. By expanding the telehealth flexibilities for out-of-state physicians to include the physician's multidisciplinary care team the legislature will ensure that patients are able to access the full range of necessary care for their condition via telehealth.

This bill will be especially impactful for those who need follow-up care from a multi-disciplinary care team following a procedure in a different state or for patients with rare conditions that may have difficulty accessing the care they need in their community, or potentially even in the state. Without these needed telehealth flexibilities to help preserve the continuity of care, patients could be forced to travel great distances at personal cost or risk disrupting their care by seeking necessary care from providers outside their physician's multi-disciplinary care team.

ATA ACTION

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Our organization believes that Alaskans should be able to receive virtual care from their preferred provider – regardless of that provider’s physical location – so long as the provider is licensed and in good standing in his or her home state, is utilizing the appropriate technology to uphold the established standard of care, and can still be held accountable by the appropriate Alaska boards and state agencies should any issues arise from treatment. By granting practice privileges to out-of-state health care providers who maintain good standing in their own states, Alaska patients will have the opportunity to connect with qualified practitioners whenever and wherever their need for care arises. Policies which enable out-of-state providers to practice at the top of their licenses and deliver high-quality health care via telehealth remove arbitrary geographical barriers that limit patients’ access to the health care services they want, need, and deserve.

For that reason, while we believe that this legislation is a step forward for Alaska’s state telehealth policy, we suggest removing the requirement that the health care services is not reasonably available in Alaska before the physician’s multidisciplinary team can provide health care services. This loosely defined “reasonable available” criteria could create uncertainty for patients and providers about what circumstances would allow for the involvement of an out-of-state physician’s multidisciplinary care team to participate in patient care. Furthermore, it would be in the best interest of patient continuity of care and provider care coordination that the out-of-state physician providing care have access to their multidisciplinary care team when meeting the patients needs, instead of a combination of known team members and others that are “reasonable available” in Alaska. This is especially important for patients who are receiving follow-up care from complex procedures or treatment for rare conditions as coordination across the care continuum is crucial – communication made easier if a patient can receive case from their physician’s entire preferred multidisciplinary care team.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can be helpful to your efforts to advance common-sense telehealth policy in Alaska. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the telehealth industry’s perspective further, please contact me at kzebley@ataaction.org.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Zebley", written over a light grey dotted background.

Kyle Zebley
Executive Director
ATA Action

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