

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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North to the Future

## Senator Cathy Giessel Senate District N

### **Senate Bill 68**                      **Sponsor Statement** **Registered Dental Hygienist in Advanced Practice**

Oral health plays a crucial role in the overall health and well-being of Alaskans. Dental diseases and disease incidence disproportionately affect our state's most vulnerable populations. The lack of access to dental care in Alaska has created enormous need in populations and communities that are underserved by the traditional system of care where the cost of obtaining treatment is high. Many states have addressed similar challenges by allowing non-dentist oral healthcare practitioners the freedom and flexibility to reach out to patients in new and creative ways to help improve access to basic oral care. Alaska would benefit from replicating such innovative oral health care delivery models.

Senate Bill 68 would establish an *Advanced Practice Permit* for Alaska-licensed dental hygienists to expand access to dental care. Dental Hygienists are skilled licensed oral healthcare professionals who focus on preventing and treating oral diseases. They have graduated from nationally-accredited dental hygiene education programs in colleges and universities and have successfully passed a national written and state clinical examination. Given their comprehensive education and clinical preparation, dental hygienists are well prepared to deliver preventative oral health care and other services to the public, safely and effectively.

Senate Bill 68 would allow dental hygienists who meet the necessary advanced education, experience and licensure requirements of the *Advanced Practice Permit* to work independently under their scope of practice across a variety of institutional and organizational settings, including nursing homes, schools, hospitals and clinics.

Licensed dental hygienists holding *Advanced Practice Permits* would open pathways by reaching out to individuals who need oral care but cannot get to a dental office; create new consumer choices for preventive treatments and services; educate individuals, families, caregivers and health providers on the basics of oral health and dental hygiene, and oral health's connection to overall health and well-being. Additionally, they would identify more acute dental issues early on, providing referrals for patients needing definitive restorative treatment.

Your support of SB68 removes barriers by allowing qualified, licensed dental hygienists to practice to the full extent of their professional training, experience and scope of practice to help promote and restore oral health to Alaska's underserved populations.

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