

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate District N

Sponsor Statement Senate Bill 44 version O

Telehealth: Physician Assistants; Drugs

The 2016 Medicaid Reform bill (SB 74) provided for the use of telehealth by revising Alaska statutes to require the Alaska State Medical Board to adopt regulations and guidelines for physicians rendering a diagnosis, providing treatment, or prescribing, dispensing, or administering a prescription drug to a person *without* conducting a physical examination under AS 08.64.364.

However, SB 74 only addressed physicians, and the Board's interpretation was the bill's provisions should not apply to physician assistants (PAs), and issued guidelines outlining different requirements for PAs and physicians. This has effectively barred PAs from practicing telemedicine, requiring them to first conduct in-person examinations.

Senate Bill 44 amends the law, aligning with the intent of the Medicaid Reform bill, clarifying that physician assistants can provide telemedicine in collaboration with and under the oversight of physicians. Under SB 44, the PAs would be subject to the same statutory oversight as physicians regarding the practice of telemedicine, as well as the same disciplinary sanctions when appropriate.

This bill will allow PAs to use telemedicine, increasing healthcare opportunities in medically underserved and rural areas. This is particularly important in Alaska, with its vast geographical challenges and limited access to vital health care.

SB44 also allows the Department of Health and Social Services to update the Medicaid Preferred Drug List quarterly to take advantage of potential cost savings to the state and improve prescription drug options for patients. The ability to do so is expected to save the state an additional \$2-3 million a year in pharmacy costs. This quarterly update mechanism is viewed as a "best practice" model and is utilized by most states.

Please join me in support of Senate Bill 44.

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