

Alaska State Legislature Majority News



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Senate Passes Bill to Address Physician Shortage *HB 260 exempts services of volunteers from malpractice*

(Juneau)—Alaskans could have greater access to medical care under a bill sponsored by Rep. Paul Seaton that unanimously passed the Senate today.

[HB 260](#) extends the ability of licensed physicians and other health care providers to administer health care free of charge by exempting such services from malpractice liability.

“I am really excited about the potential benefits of HB 260. Health care providers will no longer have a disincentive to volunteer their services. It will be especially helpful to retiring health professionals who wish to donate services but no longer carry malpractice insurance,” said Seaton (R-Homer).

“This change will help provide medical care for more Alaskans, many of whom are least able to afford it,” said Sen. Ben Stevens (R-Anchorage), who signed on as a co-sponsor of the bill.

Alaska has historically had difficulty attracting and maintaining adequate numbers of qualified physicians, and currently ranks 49th among states in the number of physicians per capita. Without civil liability protection, retired physicians are more reluctant to provide free services to the indigent and elderly.

With limited exceptions, HB 260 exempts from liability only health care services provided for free to individuals willing to receive such services. It does not in any other way alter medical malpractice laws or liability, and health care providers would still be liable for actions resulting from gross negligence, reckless behavior or intentional misconduct. Services must be provided at a medical facility owned or operated by a government entity or non-profit organization, which would still be legally liable.

After a possible reconsideration vote, House Bill 260 goes back to the House for concurrence with Senate changes.

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