



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 4, 2017

Senator Shelley Hughes
Alaska State Capitol, Room 125
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for SB 32, Prescriptions for Biological Products

Dear Senator Hughes:

The Alaska Commission on Aging is pleased to offer our support for SB 32, a bill authored by you, that would update regulations of the Board of Pharmacy to allow for the substitution of biologic medications deemed interchangeable by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and which are approved by a patient, their doctor, and pharmacist as appropriate for a patient's health care. Based on our understanding, this legislation will provide greater access to new and potentially less costly treatment options and update current state law regarding generic drug substitution and the use of FDA approved biologic medications. Currently, Alaska has no laws regarding the use of biologics which limits the use of new treatment options that could provide enhanced care at an affordable cost for Alaskans.

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is a Governor-appointed board within the Department of Health and Social Services that is responsible for planning services for seniors, educating Alaskans about senior issues, and making recommendations directly to the Legislature and the Governor regarding policy and budget items that affect the growing senior population, who now number approximately 126,000 people age 60+. As a disclaimer, ACoA's views do not necessarily reflect those held by the Department of Health and Social Services.

Although this legislation affects medical treatment for all Alaskans, our letter focuses on the benefits we perceive for older people. Biologics are used in current medical practice to treat the most serious, life-changing illnesses such as cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and others. These diseases impact many older Alaskans. Reportedly biologic medicines, including hormone therapies, have contributed to significant advances in cancer treatment. This biologic treatment has greatly enhanced oncology supportive care for patients receiving chemotherapy with compromised immune systems. Biologic medications have also advanced treatment for patients with autoimmune inflammatory disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, plaque psoriasis, Crohn's disease, and colitis. Biologic treatments allow for improved management of these diseases by specifically targeting the biochemical pathways of inflammation.

If a prescribed treatment is meeting the patient's needs – allowing them to live full and productive lives – then there may be no need to consider a biologic. However, if these medicines are not achieving the desired outcome and there is a biologic medicine available, then a biologic medication would offer a different option for the physician, patient, and the health care team to consider.

Decisions regarding medical care are personal and belong to a patient in consultation with their doctor and health care team. Our primary concern with this legislation is that biologics may not be covered by insurance companies at this time. To this end, we recommend that medical practitioners counsel their patients about

costs and payment responsibility for biologic treatments in order to promote transparency and reduce disappointment.

The Commission supports SB 32 and appreciates your leadership of this legislation to provide enhanced patient access to new and life-enhancing therapies. For further information about our position, please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879). Please feel free to include the Commission's letter in the bill packet for SB 32.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director