HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTIETH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVES EDGMON, Fansler, Tuck, Kito, Westlake, Spohnholz, Guttenberg, Drummond, Parish, Gara, Tarr

Introduced: 3/6/17
Referred: Labor and Commerce

A RESOLUTION

1 **Urging the Federal Communications Commission to increase the Rural Health Care**
2 **Program budget sufficiently to adjust for inflation, advances in technology and the**
3 **services available with increased broadband, and the increase in demand for**
4 **broadband-based services and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to**
5 **future funding years, ensuring that rural communities in the state continue to have**
6 **access to affordable broadband telehealth services.**

7 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

8 **WHEREAS** the Federal Communication Commission's Rural Health Care Program is
9 essential in enabling providers to deliver affordable telehealth services in the rural
10 communities of the state; and
11 **WHEREAS** the Rural Health Care Program budget has remained static for 20 years,
12 and the current $400,000,000 budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation,
13 advances in technology, and increased demand for services; and
14 **WHEREAS** the Federal Communications Commission recently updated the E-rate

budget for schools, from $2,250,000,000 in 1997 to $3,940,000,000 in 2015, and indexed it for inflation, reflecting increases in demand; and

WHEREAS the Federal Communications Commission expects that demand may exceed the cap for the first time in 2017, and an equivalent budget today, adjusted for inflation, would be approximately $600,000,000; and

WHEREAS, in 2015, state rural health care providers received more than $82,000,000, 20.5 percent of the total budget, in rural health care support, an increase of 35 percent, in dollars, from 2014; and

WHEREAS rural health care support enables telehealth services to be provided that dramatically improve access to care, including mental and behavioral health care and substance abuse services; accelerate diagnosis and treatment; avoid unnecessary medivacs; and expand local treatment options; and

WHEREAS the state has no funding obligation to the Rural Health Care Universal Service Support Fund;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the Federal Communications Commission to increase the Rural Health Care Program budget sufficiently to adjust for inflation, advances in technology and the services available with increased broadband, and the increase in demand for broadband-based services; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the Federal Communications Commission to index the Rural Health Care Program budget for inflation and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to future funding years, ensuring that rural communities in the state continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services, critical for improving access to care.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.