

Alaska Territorial Medical Association

1121 Fourth Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska

February 29, 1956

Association of American Physicians & Surgeons
185 North Wabash Avenue
Chicago 1, Illinois

Gentlemen:

Your fantastic "Emergency Bulletin No. 4-56" of February 25, 1956, is without question the most shocking piece of mail we have ever received. The shock is all the more severe when we consider that you have doubtless air mailed this bulletin to every medical society in the country plus countless other influential organizations and persons.

If your action in considering the Alaska Mental Health Act - S.2973; H.R. 6376, stems from a sincere desire to see justice done, (and we most certainly hope this is the case), then we can only conclude that it is one of the most unbelievably irresponsible actions ever to come from your organization, or from any other. Your bulletin literally throbs with a palpable ignorance on the subject of the care of the mentally ill in Alaska and the proposed legislation.

You might have corresponded with the Alaska Territorial Medical Association to seek the views of the physicians of Alaska relative to the care of the mentally ill in Alaska, as well as the proposed legislation, but you did not. For your interest, I am attaching a copy of a resolution unanimously adopted by the Alaska Territorial Medical Association on 21 February 1956.

You might have contacted the Alaska Department of Health, the Alaska Mental Health Association, or practicing psychiatrists in the Territory, but you did not. The content of your bulletin indicates that you made no attempt to get any facts on the situation.

In your bulletin, you state that the proposed legislation, among other things, "means the creation of a potential 'American Siberia'", to which people could be sent. Had you bothered to investigate, you would have discovered that for more than fifty years, all Alaskans committed for mental illness have been sent to an "American Siberia" in the form of Morningside Hospital in Portland, Oregon.

You refer to and condemn the method of commitment provided for in the proposed legislation. This is remarkable in itself when one considers that it is a method used and found quite satisfactory by several states, and all the more remarkable when one considers that at present the only commitment procedure in Alaska is through the criminal courts, with the patient not necessarily being seen by a psychiatrist or any other physician. Contrary to what is stated in your bulletin, the proposed legislation protects the individual by guaranteeing the right of jury trial and the writ of habeas corpus.

If you were interested in the economic side of the care of the mental health of Alaskans (who incidentally pay all the taxes you do without voting representation in Congress) you would see that the proposed appropriation of TWELVE AND ONE HALF MILLION DOLLARS and the allocation of ONE MILLION acres of Alaskan land would represent a saving to the United States. As a ready source of information on this subject, we suggest that you examine the United States Department of Interior's expenditures in behalf of the mentally ill of Alaska at Morningside Hospital over the past fifty years.

You imply in your bulletin that there is an attempt to surreptitiously slip this legislation through Congress. Anyone who reads the Congressional Record or the Washington Report on the Medical Sciences knows that H.R.6376 was openly considered in committee, with public hearings, in the House, and is being handled in a like manner in the Senate.

Unless you wish to actively aid the ceaseless efforts of the forces of darkness, let us urge you to retract your Bulletin No. 4-56, familiarize yourselves with this proposed legislation and the needs therefor, and actively work for its passage.

Very truly yours,

/s/ MILO H. FRITZ, ~~MD~~
Milo H. Fritz, M. D.
Past President
Alaska Territorial Medical Association

/s/ Robert B. Wilkins
Robert B. Wilkins, M D.
Secretary-Treasurer
Alaska Territorial Medical Association

RBW/ed
attach.

(Resolution mentioned as being attached in the above letter
was inserted in Congressional Record and is attached hereto)

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