



Board of Certified Direct-Entry Midwives

Alaska Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing

Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2024 at 9:00 AM AKST via Zoom

These minutes were approved by the board in accordance with PL-12/online voting.

Members Present: Bethel Belisle, CDM, chair; Rachel Pugh, CDM; Darcy Lucey, APRN; Hannah St. George

Staff Present: Sara Chambers, Boards and Regulations Advisor

Approximately twenty members of the public were in attendance.

9:00am Call to Order

Chair Belisle called the meeting to order. All members were present. Each member declared she had no conflicts of interest.

9:10am Discussion Regarding Executive Order 130

Chair Belisle read through the executive order and explained that it changes every reference from the board to the department. She stated that the Midwives Association of Alaska (MAA) met last Friday and voted to unanimously oppose the EO. Ms. Lucey said she was also opposed to eliminating the board and doesn't know how the department will develop expertise in the profession without being licensed or how the order makes sense. Chair Belisle said the stated reason was efficiency, and the governor finds there is no longer a need for the board. She opened discussion on how to move forward.

Ms. Chambers offered to answer any questions that she would be able to in hope that any concerns could be put to rest or addressed going forward. She stated the Department of Health confirmed that certified midwives would still be able to continue to be reimbursed by Medicaid. The approval is based on certification, not the existence of a board. Ms. Belisle said that if the board is eliminated, it could be a priority of the board to ensure that is clarified.

Ms. Pugh stated she doesn't trust the promises of the Administration and wants guarantees in writing. She referred to the Medicaid handbook as the source of her information that a board is required. Pugh said some midwives had a meeting with someone in the governor's office, who said nothing would change if the order is effective.

Ms. Belisle asked Ms. Pugh to continue to chair the meeting; she left because her client was in labor.

Ms. Pugh said that if the order passed, midwives would have no voice and that there are no guarantees that needed statutory and regulatory changes would be made or that midwives would be invited to provide input. She said that government bureaucracy could not effectively manage a health care program and that people generally don't know what a midwife is and does.

Ms. Pugh said the options are for the governor to rescind the order or for the legislature to vote it down. MAA is mobilizing calls and emails to legislators. Ms. Lucey said she felt everyone should do whatever they can. Ms. Pugh said she asked Rep. Allard to let her know if there were opportunities to take action.

Ms. Pugh said that she and others met with a representative of the governor's office and that she would love to meet with the governor and find out the reasons for the order.

Ms. Pugh read several statistics regarding midwifery in Alaska, linking 2022 birth statistics and Medicaid details as justification for the board. She stated that midwives save \$5 million in health care costs through Medicaid, and the board does not cost that much. Ms. Chambers clarified that the order moving the program to the department would not change the practice of midwifery or Medicaid reimbursement. She explained that those types of statutory changes would be made with the legislature, not through the department, and everyone has access and ability to influence that process. She also said the law requires regulations to be adopted using the same public process as the board does now. She reiterated the commissioner is dedicated to ensuring open communication with licensees and stakeholders.

Ms. Pugh said she wanted these promises in writing. She is concerned that the person in charge would just call a physician to get input on midwifery practice. Ms. Chambers said the department is looking at many options to create structures for input and to ensure open communication are in place. She said there are many health care programs currently operated by the division without a board, and the department will continue to seek input on any changes at the very least as it does now. She reminded the board that the regulations process, by law, requires public input be solicited and considered. That would continue to include licensees and anyone who requested to be on the interested parties list.

Ms. Pugh asked how many boards have been eliminated and taken over by the department. Chambers said there are more than 20 programs, many of which are health care, that the department manages. She said no boards had been eliminated in the 13 years she has been with the department. Ms. Lucey said one of the programs without a board is naturopaths, and they are very unhappy that they are unable to do many things that they are trained to do because they don't have a board. Ms. Chambers said that was not because of lack of a board but because the legislature has not passed a bill expanding their scope of practice.

The department continues to work with the naturopathic society on their legislation and that they do not want a full board. Ms. St. George said naturopaths want a board because they could then accept Medicaid.

Ms. Pugh said she had called Ida Darragh, executive director of the North American Registry of Midwives, who was not aware of a regulatory board being dissolved and managed by a department. She said boards across the nation were watching Rep. Allard's bill as a model other states will follow.

Ms. Pugh opened the floor for public comment. Nine members of the public asked questions or made statements regarding the executive order, all of which raised concern.

Ms. St. George asked what the board's options were regarding travel. Ms. Chambers said although the board intended to meet on February 7, there was no travel request in process since no board member stated they could travel to Juneau for that meeting. If the board voted for one or more people to come to Juneau, she would carry forward to the division the board's request for an expedited review. She reminded the board that it was unlikely to be approved since the policy is to submit a travel request six weeks ahead of the travel date since approval and booking through the state system take time, and last-minute travel can be very expensive.

Ms. Lucey moved that the board oppose the executive order dissolving the board. Ms. St. George seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Ms. St. George moved that Ms. Pugh write a letter and speak on behalf of the board on this issue. Ms. Lucey seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Ms. Lucey moved for one or more board members to travel to Juneau to meet with legislators at a date when travel could be approved. Ms. St. George seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Ms. Lucey moved to adjourn at 10:17 p.m. Ms. St. George seconded. **Approved unanimously.**