DEACONESS BILLINGS CLINIC

SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY
EXHIBIT NO. 3
DATE: 03-11-2005
BILL NO. HB457

March 10, 2005

Senator Brent R. Cromley (D)
PO Box 2559
Billings, MT 59103-2559

Dear Senator Cromley,

Subject: HB 457

We are a group of nine board-certified radiologists, all members of the multispecialty group practice at Deaconess Billings Clinic (DBC) and serving the radiology needs of Billings plus a large regional referral area in central and eastern Montana. We are writing in support of HB 457, which clarifies and codifies the practice of Radiologist Assistants (RAs) and Radiology Practitioner Assistants (RPAs). These individuals are licensed radiologic technologists with two years of additional training, allowing them to perform routine radiology procedures and assist the radiologist in providing patient care.

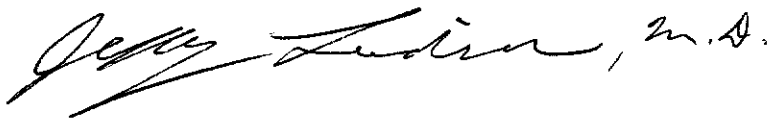
We have a unique set of circumstances in Montana involving many rural health care providers, great distances, and highly skilled medical services centrally located in Billings. DBC has taken the lead in recent years is using sophisticated telemedicine/teleradiology services to bring high levels of care to patients in outlying areas—assisting local doctors and their patients and frequently allowing consultations to occur without the need for patient travel. In recent years, we have expanded this service with "NightHawk" Radiology, utilizing American-trained, American Board-Certified Radiologists, who are fully licensed in Montana and credentialed by our hospital. This service has been extended through us to many hospitals in the region and has allowed us to provide quality 24/7 coverage to the region while maintaining full coverage in Billings at DBC.

HB 457 is designed as the next logical step in providing high-quality patient care to the region. We would like to have our Radiologist Assistant/RPA (and others we may hire) provide diagnostic and basic therapeutic radiology services to our surrounding communities. We would be in contact with the RA via teleradiology and would supervise and direct activities in the same way we now do within our hospital. This method of practice allows us to maximize our efficiency and improves care for patients in Billings and the surrounding region.

It has come to our attention that the American College of Radiology (ACR) has contacted you and expressed some reservations regarding HB 457. The concerns addressed relate to presumed impact on patient care. We respect the ACR and most of us are, in fact, members. However, the concerns of the ACR do not reflect the reality of our practice in Montana. Nationally, radiologists

have been increasingly concerned with protecting their "turf" against encroaching outside forces, either from other communities, other specialties, or even other countries. Our concerns in Montana are how to maintain high-quality clinical care over large distances in sparsely populated areas. Many of these areas are only partially served by radiologists currently, with diminishing prospects for future service. By using Radiologist Assistants/RPAs, we can reverse the trends and continue to expand coverage to the patients of Montana.

Respectfully,



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