

February 3, 2017

Senator David Wilson
Chair, Senate Health & Social Services Committee

Senator Mia Costello
Chair, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee

Alaska State Capitol
4th Ave and Main Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Support for Senate Bill 32

Dear Senator Wilson and Senator Costello:

On behalf of the patients in Alaska living with a rare disease, the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) requests you to support SB 32, an act relating to interchangeable biologic products (biosimilars). This legislation has the potential to benefit many of our organization's members, and it will protect patients by including language calling for prescriber communication. With your support, this legislation will benefit the numerous patients suffering from rare disorders in Alaska.

According to the legislation, pharmacists will be required to communicate – to a patient's prescribing physician – any and all dispensations of a substitute biological product for another biologic drug. NORD applauds the development of these innovative and valuable therapeutic treatments and supports the expanded access that biological products will offer for rare disease patients. Given the distinctions between biologics, the substitution of a biological product must include communication between the prescriber and pharmacist to keep patient safety a top priority.

NORD is the leading voice of the rare disease community dedicated to helping people with rare "orphan" diseases and assisting the organizations that serve them. Any disease affecting fewer than 200,000 Americans is considered rare. With nearly 7,000 rare diseases identified and 30 million Americans affected, the population represented by NORD is extraordinarily heterogeneous. We believe strongly that every patient deserves the medical care that is best suited for their medical situation and that is most likely to give them the best results. Based on the reports we receive from member organizations, as well as individuals, it is increasingly difficult for rare disease patients to receive optimum care if any degree of individual customization is required.

Considering this challenge, prescriber communication between a pharmacist and a doctor about which biological product has been dispensed can help ensure all rare patients receive optimum care.

Biological products differ from generics in that they are not identical to their biologic counterpart. Due to the sensitive manufacturing process of biological products, even the slightest change can have a significant negative impact on a patient's therapeutic regimen. This is a serious issue for a large segment of the rare disease community because not all drugs work the same for every patient, especially when dealing with unpredictable disease progression.

To ensure patient safety, health care providers need to know which medicine was dispensed to the patient, whether a substitution was made and to what alternative product. These factors are all critical information that needs to be taken into consideration when supplying a patient with medication.

NORD is committed to the identification, treatment, and cure of rare disorders through programs of education, advocacy, research, and service. Patients in the rare disease community experience many unforeseeable variables and outcomes. By securing effective biological product substitution laws, Alaska can guarantee these patients prudence in prescriber communication that has the potential to alter dramatically the course of their treatment.

One again, on behalf of the NORD and the millions of Americans who face the struggles of a rare disease, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on this legislation. We strongly urge you to support SB 32, which includes prescriber communication, and will ensure increased access to this new age of medicines is done in a safe, reliable, and consistent way for patients and physicians.

If we can supply additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know. Tim Boyd, NORD's Associate Director of State Policy, is available to assist as needed. Tim can be reached at (202) 545-3830 or via email at tboyd@rarediseases.org.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Saltonstall, CEO

CC: Members, Senate Health & Social Services Committee
Members, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee