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March of Dimes Foundation
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March 9, 2011

The Honorable Bettye Davis
State Capitol, Room 30
Juneau, AK 99801



RE: Support for Senate Bill 5 pending in the House Health and Social Services Committee

Dear Senator Davis:

I am writing to you to express the support of March of Dimes for **Senate Bill 5**. The mission of March of Dimes to improve maternal and child health by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality can best be achieved if all women of childbearing age, infants and children have access to comprehensive health coverage.

Senate Bill 5 reinstates Medicaid and Denali KidCare (DKC) for children and pregnant women in Alaska up to 200% of Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This was the original eligibility level when DKC was established in 1997. The eligibility threshold was reduced and frozen at 175% FPL by the Legislature in 2003. This bill will help reinstate eligibility to many of Alaska's 24,000 uninsured children as well as provide maternity coverage for several of Alaska's 34,000 women of childbearing age who have no health insurance.

The Institute of Medicine has found that health coverage is the single most important factor in determining whether or not a child receives needed health services. Coverage also plays a key role in access to maternity care services for pregnant women.

Women who receive maternity care are more likely to have access to screening and diagnostic tests that can help to identify problems early; services to manage developing and existing problems; and education, counseling, and referral to reduce risky behaviors like substance use and poor nutrition. Such care may thus help improve the health of both mothers and infants. For example, singleton infants born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care in 2004 were nearly twice as likely to be low birth weight (less than 5 1/2 pounds) as infants born to mothers who received early prenatal care —9.9 percent compared with 5.9 percent.

In addition to pregnant women, health insurance status is the single most important influence in determining whether health care is accessible to children when they need it, according to another Institute of Medicine study. Though uninsured newborns are more likely than insured babies to be sick, they receive fewer hospital services.

Uninsured children are the most likely to have no usual source of medical care - 28.8 percent, compared with only 2.3 percent of privately insured youngsters and 4.6 percent of children in public insurance programs.

March of Dimes is a leading nonprofit organization for maternal, infant and child health. With chapters nationwide and its premier event, March for Babies, March of Dimes works to improve the health of women, infants and children. **I urge you bring Senate Bill 5 before the House Health and Social Services Committee for a vote and ensure passage of this important piece of legislation.**

Sincerely,



Janie Odgers
State Director