

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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### SPONSOR STATEMENT FOR SCR 16

*"Proclaiming May 2012 to be Celiac Disease Awareness Month."*

SCR 16 designates May 2012 as Celiac Disease Awareness Month.

Celiac disease - often referred to as gluten intolerance - affects an estimated 3 million men, women and children in the United States. It is one of the most common genetic diseases in the world and affects an estimated 1 in 133 Americans. Assessments indicate that over 5,300 Alaskans (according to the 2010 Census, Alaska's population is 710,231) are living with this disease and, sadly, 97% (nearly 5,200) don't even know it.

Misdiagnosis is common and costly. Individuals who are incorrectly diagnosed and not treated for celiac disease can face health care costs averaging \$5,000-\$12,000, not including lost work time. The average length of time for a person to be correctly diagnosed is 6-10 years; left undiagnosed and untreated, Celiac disease can lead to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, loss of calcium, osteoporosis, lactose intolerance, infertility, certain forms of cancer, depression, and neurological complications. There is no known cause or cure for this disease. It is treated by maintaining a strict, lifelong adherence to a gluten-free diet.

While no cure has yet been found, researchers are hard at work looking for a way to combat and eliminate this genetic disorder. Prestigious institutions like the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center – which is seeking to find a cure by 2026 – and the University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research are sponsoring teams of scientists and doctors who are tirelessly searching for ways to fight and eventually end Celiac disease.

SCR 16 would observe Celiac Disease Awareness Month by promoting awareness of this prevalent disease, lending to early detection and correct diagnosis. It also provides an opportunity to honor our dedicated health professionals and to recognize individuals and their families whose lives have been affected by this disease.