

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012

To Our Honorable Senate State Affairs Committee Members:

Celiac Disease is a known and increasingly common, although “invisible” autoimmune disease that leaves it’s victims without the ability to consume most common foods enjoyed by the “average” person. Celiac Disease causes the body to attack the lining (microscopic villi) of the GI tract when exposed to gluten, a primary protein in foods containing a variety of grains including but not limited to wheat and barley. This includes both the obvious foods such as breads and pastas, and the non-obvious sources of gluten including soy sauces and various medications that include gluten-containing binders. Not to mention possible unintentional exposures to gluten, due to cross contamination... such as using the same knife that cut a regular piece of bread to cut special “gluten free” bread products. Due to the “invisibility” of this disease, most persons with gluten issues see 8 healthcare providers during an average of 10 years before having a “name/diagnosis” (and “treatment plan”) to put with their various and often inconsistent symptoms... in addition to their chronic pain, mental anguish and suffering, daily excruciating gastro-intentional track discomforts, and poor overall health status (due to GI villi damage and thus micro-nutrient deficiencies) by the time they are diagnosed. Due to my field of nutritional expertise as a Registered Dietitian in Anchorage, I commonly instruct, guide and sympathize with my patients who are knowledgeably managing this disease (along with their other health conditions).

However with your assistance, and the State of Alaska’s support for SCR 16 to increase the awareness of Celiac Disease (with May as the Month of Awareness), we can not only increase exposure about this “invisible” disease, we can increase awareness that exposure to various food elements may be considered “risky” for many within our Alaska state. With this raised awareness, we may be able to raise “safer” restaurant and grocery store atmospheres, by increasing voluntary actions by these facilities to increase choices that are Gluten-Safe and do not risk or compromise their health. This will ultimately increase Alaska’s local community positively by promoting a voluntarily safer atmosphere for persons with Celiac Disease and others suffering from gluten-sensitivities.

My Sincere Appreciation for Your Time and Consideration,

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