

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR LESIL MCGUIRE

Sponsor Statement CS for Senate Bill 219 (FIN)

The CS for Senate Bill 219 establishes a traumatic or acquired brain injury program and registry in the Department of Health and Social Services. Currently, Alaska has no specific program specifically to deal with brain injury and yet Alaska has one of the highest rates in the nation. Annually, there are about 800 Alaskans hospitalized with a traumatic brain injury resulting from falls, car crashes, domestic violence, All Terrain Vehicle crashes, and snow-machine crashes, among others. Furthermore, an approximately equal number of Alaskans are suffering from acquired brain injuries resulting from stroke, aneurism, or tumors.

Alaska urban and rural residents, including military are being discharged to their homes with little understanding of brain injury or access to in-state rehabilitation, severely impacting their families. Limited education about the injury, learning to cope with a person who has changed, overwhelming stress from insurance, bureaucracy, and financial burdens and change in family roles may render families dysfunctional.

With appropriate and available care, rehabilitation, community and family support, even the individual who is most severely injured can live at home, return to school or work, or engage in meaningful and productive lives.

Funding a Traumatic or Acquired Brain Injury (T/ABI) Program gives authority to the Department of Health and Social Services to collect data on the injured, positioning the state to access Medicaid funds for T/ABI. Medicaid services for T/ABI will be matched 50% by federal funds. The bill allows for streamlining department services and activities that are unique to T/ABI. This would better assist families and individuals with T/ABI in knowing how to access services and supports.

Early treatment may reduce future medical and social costs. Without appropriate services, some individuals with T/ABI may pose a threat to themselves or others. Without assistance, individuals with TBI often end up homeless, in jail or in nursing homes. Service coordination, rehabilitation, and appropriate supports can help to minimize these risks.