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RE: Letter of Support, Senate Bill 144

As a long-time Alaska pediatrician I am writing in support of Senate Bill 144 to temporarily reinstate the child and adult immunization program.

For over 30 years, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Immunization Program had a “universal” vaccine program – distributing all recommended childhood and adult vaccines to public and private providers in Alaska. These vaccines were supported almost entirely with 2 sources of federal funding. Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program (an entitlement program) pays for children who meet federal criteria; and Section 317 of the U.S. Public Health Service Act covered the cost for children not VFC-eligible and adult vaccines. In 2008, the federal government notified the State that the State had been “overfunded” with 317 funding compared with other states and that Centers for Disease Control would be decreasing the Section 317 funding to the State during 2010 to 2013 from \$4.3 million to \$0.7 million. Therefore, Alaska is losing \$3.5 million dollars in federal funding for critical vaccines between 2010 and 2013.

This staged funding decrease started in 2011 –

- In 2011 the State stopped providing any adult vaccine.
- In 2012, the State Immunization Program will no longer provide the following childhood vaccines to non-VFC eligible children: *influenza, pneumococcal conjugate, rotavirus, and varicella.*
- In 2013, the State Immunization Program will no longer provide any vaccines except for VFC eligible children.

Why should we be concerned?

1. When faced with the complexities of maintaining two separate vaccine supplies for VFC and non-VFC eligible children, as well as fronting the cost for expensive vaccines, many small medical practices will stop providing vaccines to their patients.
2. This decrease in provision of vaccines will result in a critical decrease in immunization coverage (proportion of vaccinated children) in children, leading to increased risk of outbreaks from diseases like measles, mumps, pertussis, chicken pox and hepatitis A. Alaska cannot afford further downward trend in coverage – in 2009 our 2 year old vaccination rate was 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation.
3. The State could be left without an adequate vaccine supply and infrastructure to allow for timely response to outbreaks of measles, mumps, hepatitis A, pertussis, if such outbreaks were to occur in Alaska.

Senate Bill 144 is a stop-gap measure to fill the gap left by the reduction in federal funding and reinstate the Alaska Immunization Program’s ability to provide vaccine for under-insured and uninsured Alaskans currently not covered by other programs. I urge Alaskans to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn Singleton, MD MPH