

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Representative Bob Herron

Official Business



State Capitol
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House Bill 310 – State Immunization Program

“An Act temporarily reinstating the child and adult immunization program in the Department of Health and Social Services; and providing for an effective date.”

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 310 is a stop-gap measure to reinstate the Alaska Immunization Program (AIP), which aims to prevent and control vaccine-preventable diseases in Alaska, to its former level of coverage.

Every year, Alaskans remember a significant healthcare emergency – our Iditarod commemorates the 1925 “Great Race of Mercy” serum run to Nome. Then, Nome and several surrounding communities were in the throes of a diphtheria epidemic, and dog teams with their fearless mushers braved the elements to relay a life-saving antitoxin to them. Today, because of vaccines, the disease has been nearly eradicated from the United States.

Alaska’s communities are highly vulnerable to significant but entirely preventable health crises. For many years, Federal funding ensured the AIP could make preventative vaccines accessible to all Alaskans desiring them. But that funding has seen a sharp downturn – from \$4.3 Million in FY2010, to a mere \$700 thousand in FY2013. These reductions have cut the number of vaccines available to children, and completely discontinued those available to adults.

Preventative vaccines control diseases such as whooping cough, lockjaw, pneumonia, meningitis, polio, and others – saving lives every day. Prevention, generally, is key – and by far the most cost-effective way to address unavoidable health issues. If we do not prevent, we will have to treat, at far greater human and financial cost.

HB 310 and Senate Companion SB 144 temporarily substitute state funding for the decrease in federal funding to AIP, through FY2015, while we seek a more permanent solution. It provides a humane and business-smart solution to the growing problem of unnecessary disease wracking our communities.

Please join me in support of HB 310.