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RE: Letter of Support for Senate Bill 169 to establish a Vaccine Assessment Account

As a long-time Alaska pediatrician I am writing about my concerns regarding gaps in access to critical childhood and adult vaccines in Alaska. House Bill 310 temporarily reinstated funds for a period of 3 years for underinsured children and underinsured and uninsured adults. This legislation is temporary and funding will go away in 2015.

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. Vaccines were supplied with federal funding from the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program (an entitlement program which pays for children who meet federal criteria); and Section 317 of the U.S. Public Health Service Act which covered vaccine cost for VFC-ineligible children and adult. In 2008, the federal government notified the state immunization program that they were decreasing the Section 317 funding to the State during 2010 to 2013 from \$4.3 million to \$0.7 million. House Bill #310 attempted to temporarily reinstate funds for underinsured children and underinsured/uninsured adults while permanent solutions were sought but this bill runs out in 2015.

Unfortunately, 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, some small medical practices have stopped providing vaccines to their patients.

Alaska has had low immunization coverage rates in children, exacerbated by difficult access to vaccine for some. These low immunization coverage rates increase the imminent threat that our state could experience outbreaks of diseases like measles and hepatitis A which have been well-controlled for many years. Measles outbreaks are occurring across Europe and the Middle East and imported measles cases are increasing in the US. Paralytic polio remains endemic in a few countries and is only a plane flight away.

This is a critical time to develop a long-term solution to vaccine access in Alaska. Other states, including Washington and Idaho, have found a solution in developing a Vaccine Assessment Account which facilitates universal purchase of vaccines. By collecting payments from health plans, insurers, and other payers and remitting the funds to the state, the Vaccine Account makes it possible for:

- Physicians, clinics, and hospitals to receive state-supplied vaccines at no charge
- All children and adults to have easy access to critical vaccines
- All payers to participate in one of the most efficient, cost-effective systems in the country for purchasing and distributing childhood vaccines.

House Bill 310 is a stop-gap measure which is running out. The current system in Alaska leaves many without easy access to affordable vaccines. Our childhood immunization rates are among the lowest in the nation. I urge the legislature to take action and support Senate Bill 169 to increase access to vaccine for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Rosalyn Singleton, MD MPH