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Testimony Patricia Senner MS, RN, ANP
Alaska Nurses Association
SB 169

On behalf of the Alaska Nurses Association I want to testify in support of HB 169.

As a Nurse Practitioner who has provided immunizations to homeless teenagers I can attest to the difficulties in providing immunizations that have occurred since the state moved away from universal coverage. In my clinic I had to keep two separate sets of vaccines, one for those eligible for vaccines through the State of Alaska program, one set for those who were not eligible.

Not only did this make for increased administrative difficulties, and increase costs to my clinic, it often led to vaccine wastage. Particularly for vaccines in multi dose vials, when I wasn't using one vial for everyone, one of my vials would reach its expiration date before it was empty and would have to be disposed. This is costly and wasteful.

I have seen how much large distributors pay for vaccines, and I know what I had to pay for the same vaccines, and there is a large difference in cost. This program would be immensely helpful to us providers, even if we have to pay for vaccines for those who are uninsured.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Dr. Lily Lou, MD

1:30 pm, Friday February 21st

1-855-463-5009

- Medical Director of the Newborn Intensive Care Unit at The Children's Hospital at Providence (Anchorage)
- President of the Alaska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- District VIII representative to the executive committee of the AAP Section on Perinatal Pediatrics.

I am speaking in favor of Senate Bill 169 for 4 reasons:

*1) The prevention of infectious disease by immunization has been one of the most significant advances in health care in human history. We use the term "vaccine-preventable illnesses" because we actually can avoid these illnesses—there's not too much in medicine that can be so easily impacted. ***There is no doubt in my mind that we should continue this strategy of prevention.****

- These diseases are not eradicated, they are still out there but controlled by current immunization practices
- Spate of Measles outbreaks in 2011 (16 outbreaks, 107 people infected) → CDC estimated a cost of \$5.3 million
- Vaccinating our population will protect all of us. Barriers to immunization (for those without insurance coverage) put *all* of us at greater risk for these illnesses.
- A Universal Purchase Program (or Vaccine Assessment Account) will likely lead to significant savings in the COST of administering these lifesaving medications. It will also improve Alaska's health by INCREASING IMMUNIZATION RATES among people who currently don't have coverage

2) Good stewardship

- A vaccine assessment account will allow us to benefit from volume purchasing at substantially discounted, federal contract rates.
- Other states that have followed this route have shown significant savings. For example, New Hampshire began their Universal Purchase Program in 2003, and they estimate that they have seen cumulative savings of nearly \$50 million dollars since then. We would have the benefit of not being the first—we can learn from the experience of

others in designing our program.

- There are now *several* ways to obtain vaccine and the logistics for the various systems have become quite cumbersome. If we had a single path for all vaccines, for all Alaskans, we will be able to streamline the process and SAVE ON ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS, while also making it easier for providers, thus reducing barriers to this important public health measure.

3) Access to care

- In our current system, some providers cannot afford to buy expensive vaccines up front, if they cannot be assured that insurance will cover their costs—this is especially true in the small communities which are so typical of the grand scale of our state. This creates a two-tiered system in access to care. Our goal should be to provide this *cost-effective* preventive care to optimize the health of all of Alaska's people.

4) This is not a new need, and we now have the opportunity to really think about the best way to fund this essential pillar of health care for Alaska, going forward

- Vaccines were funded more generously until 2008 (VFC and Section 317-Public Health Service Act)—about 95% of funds were cut from the federal budget.
- You in the legislature have recognized the importance of vaccination before, and we are grateful for this insight. In 2012, through HB 310 (SB 140), state funding was put into place as a 3-year stop-gap measure—providing funds to cover us until 2015.
- If we create a VACCINE COUNCIL now—to design and implement a Universal Purchase Program by 2015, we will have enough time to be ready for the sunset of the HB 310 funding without a gap in this important health care measure. We will be able to thoughtfully build a program that will serve us well into the future.

Thank you for hearing and considering my testimony.

Please let me know if I or any other members of the pediatric care provider community can be of further assistance as you assure adequate resources for Alaska's health care needs