



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 3, 2014

Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska Capitol, Room 427
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Subject: Support SB 169, Statewide Immunization Program

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to express our support for SB 169 to establish a statewide immunization program that will provide recommended vaccines for Alaskans of all ages. This legislation, authored by you and co-sponsored by Senator French, proposes a business model that allows the program to become self-sustaining over time with revenues collected from assessment fees paid by health insurance payers and savings resulting from the state's bulk purchase of vaccine supplies at a reduced cost. It creates a permanent solution to fill the fiscal gap of reduced federal funding for Alaska's immunization program. HB 310 (SB 144) addressed this issue as a temporary measure in 2012, legislation which ACoA supported, that is scheduled to expire on July 1, 2015. Although SB 169 addresses the immunization needs of all Alaskans, our comments will focus on the benefits of this legislation we perceive for older Alaskans.

Preventative services, such as immunizations, are important tools for maintaining the health of all Alaskans at every stage of life. Immune systems weaken with age, which places older people at risk for severe illnesses from pneumonia, influenza, and shingles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccines for these conditions for all people over the age of 60. Based on our understanding, vaccines for pneumonia, influenza and shingles would be included under the statewide immunization program proposed by SB 169. Your legislation would help improve access to these vaccines by seniors who are low-income, those not eligible for Medicare, and for seniors who receive services by providers who do not accept Medicare.

SB 169 will also help a growing number of Alaskan seniors who are grandparents raising grandchildren on a fixed income with limited insurance coverage. They desire healthy grandchildren who have access to recommended immunizations recognized by public health standards. Medicare does not cover the cost of childhood immunizations, which are required for admission to public schools. Rather than seeing their grandchildren go without immunizations, many grandparents will make personal and financial sacrifices to insure their grandchildren receive the recommended immunizations. SB 169 will help reduce the cost of immunizations and improve access for these children being raised by grandparents with modest incomes.

The ACoA supports SB 169 and believes this legislation provides an innovative public-private partnership solution that will create a strong foundation for ensuring improved health outcomes for Alaskans. We thank you and Senator French for your leadership on SB 169.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Shields
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator French