

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel

CSSB 169(HSS) Statewide Vaccination Program Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 169 establishes a Statewide Vaccination Program and creates a vaccine assessment council in the Department of Health and Social Services. The purpose of the program is to monitor, purchase and distribute recommended vaccines to providers, making available universal access for all ages to vaccines.

Every year, Alaska commemorates a significant healthcare emergency-the serum run to Nome. What we call the Iditarod today was the “Great Race of Mercy” in 1925. Nome and the surrounding communities were in the throes of a diphtheria epidemic and dog teams relayed the life-saving antitoxin to them. Because of vaccines, diphtheria, a disease of the throat, tonsils, and nose that restricts the airway, has been nearly eliminated from the United States.

Recognizing the importance of access to vaccines and the vulnerability of Alaska, especially our rural communities, the late Senator Ted Stevens championed funding to the Alaska Vaccination Program to ensure the availability of preventive vaccines to all Alaskans. Since Senator Stevens’ passing, federal funding has been significantly reduced, down from \$4.3 million in FY2010 to a mere \$700,000 in FY2013. In 2012, I introduced SB 140 (HB 110) to provide additional state funding to fill the gap left by this reduction federal funding. HB 110 was meant to be a temporary measure while a more permanent solution was sought.

An innovative solution to this dilemma is to create a vaccine program that purchases vaccines in bulk, at a reduced cost, and distributes that vaccine to healthcare providers who administer them. At least nine other states have set up these “vaccine assessment boards” or similar to what SB 169 proposes. By allowing the state to continue procuring vaccines, providers avoid any financial, logistical and administrative burdens associated with purchasing vaccines privately. While insurance payers are assessed for their participation in the program, they too realize a cost saving using the bulk purchasing business model. Next to clean drinking water and good nutrition, vaccines have saved more lives than any other public-health intervention.

As state and federal government budgets shrink and the cost of vaccines rise, it is important for the state to partner with the business sector, prioritizing a sound public health policy that lays the framework for a Statewide Vaccination Program to ensure healthier futures for all Alaskans.

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