



Newest 3/10/14

Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest

Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska Legislature
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: SB 169

March 4, 2014

Dear Senator Giessel,

On behalf of Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest, I write today to thank you for sponsoring Senate Bill 169, which would establish a statewide immunization program in Alaska.

As a health care organization and a provider of vaccines, we know that immunizations are safe and effective in preventing serious diseases. In fact, vaccines are one of the most successful and cost-effective health investments in history, and this program will help ensure that Alaskans have better access to this critical health care.

It's in our state's best interest to rid the population of vaccine-preventable diseases. Expanding access to vaccines strengthens our ability to fight disease, keeps our families healthy, and improves economic stability. Immunized children are more likely to succeed in school and become healthy, productive adults.

Vaccines work to level the playing field so that everyone, no matter their circumstances, has a shot at a healthy life. Increasing access is one of the best steps we can take towards improving public health in our state. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cler
Alaska Public Affairs Manager



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

P.O. Box 110693
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693
Main: 907.465.3250
Fax: 907.465.1398

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.

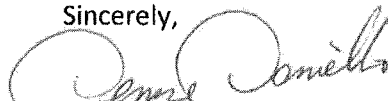
The ACoA supports SB 169 and believes this legislation provides an innovative public-private partnership solution that will create a strong foundation for ensuring improved health outcomes for Alaskans. We thank you and Senator French for your leadership on SB 169.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Shields
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator French

Alaska State Medical Association

4107 Laurel Street • Anchorage, Alaska 99508 • (907) 562-0304 • (907) 561-2063 (fax)

February 19, 2014

Honorable Cathy Giessel
Alaska Senate
State Capital Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Senate Bill 169

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) represents physicians statewide and is primarily concerned with the health of all Alaskans.

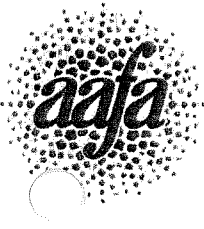
Thank you for introducing Senate Bill 169. It is well documented that vaccines improve the overall health of our communities and can ultimately prove to save future health care costs. ASMA supports your effort to increase the availability of vaccines to Alaskans and supports passage of SB 169.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to further support passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,



Michael Haugen, JD, MBA.
Executive Director
Alaska State Medical Association



Asthma and Allergy
Foundation of America®

ALASKA CHAPTER

AAFA Alaska Chapter
P.O. Box 201927
Anchorage, AK 99520-1927

February 19, 2014

Dear Senator Giessel,

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America - Alaska Chapter, I am writing to you in support of SB 169. This bill, in addition to health promotion would give the state a tool to monitor trends of vaccine usage. In a state with that has many challenges with access to healthcare it is imperative that we can study areas with low vaccination rates to determine if they are caused by a lack of education or by lack of financial access to services.

Adults and children living with asthma are at an increased risk of illness and unfortunate outcomes from a variety of diseases that are currently preventable. Common illnesses like influenza in an asthmatic person can lead to more serious conditions as well as death. However many asthmatics do not receive the flu vaccine either due to a misunderstanding of its benefits or because they do not have the financial resources to do so. It is imperative that patients have access to vaccines at a fiscally appropriate level.

Diseases like pertussis are also preventable with a vaccine however, babies and the elderly are always at risk due to vaccine timing. Asthmatic babies and adults are at even a greater risk as they already live with compromised airways. If these vulnerable populations are exposed to someone with pertussis the outcome can be grim. AAFA Alaska supports any and all programs that will allow the state to study the current levels of pertussis vaccinations in Alaska. While some people make a choice to not get vaccinated, many would like to receive the vaccination but find that their primary clinics do not carry the vaccine. The clinic are making this choice due to the cost of maintaining two sets of documentation for vaccinating children with and without vaccine funding eligibility.

The health and productivity of the people of Alaska depends on your decision. Vaccines have a real, practical and positive impact on the lives of the adults and children. Prevention of disease not only saves lives, but also reduces missed work time and school absences. All things that are good for the people of Alaska.

Sincerely,

Dale Knutsen
Executive Director
AAFA Alaska Chapter





ALASKA ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

35555 Spur Highway #266, Soldotna, AK 99669 akafp@gci.net www.alaskaafp.org 907 258-2255 office 530 326-5612 fax

January 20, 2014

Re: Alaskan Vaccine Association

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Alaska Academy of Family Physicians supports the development of an Alaskan Vaccine Association. Alaska has had low childhood immunization coverage, leaving our children vulnerable to disease outbreaks. It is critical to develop a long term solution to vaccine access in Alaska and improve our children's health. We support the development of a Vaccine Association. It has proven to be successful in other states. A Vaccine Association is a self sustaining solution which facilitates universal purchase of vaccines by collecting payments from health plans, insurers and other payers and remitting funds directly to the State. A Vaccine Association makes it possible for:

- physicians, clinics and hospitals to receive State supplied vaccines at no charge ,
- all children 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.

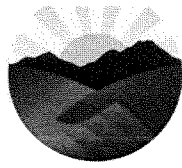
Currently, several small family practice offices find it burdensome to front the cost of vaccines and maintain separate public and private supplies of vaccines. Creating a Vaccine Association will improve the ability of health care providers throughout Alaska to offer vaccines. We support the development of a Vaccine Association this session.

The Alaska Academy of Family Physicians is a state chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians which was founded in 1947; the AAFP represents more than 100,000 physicians and medical students nation-wide. It is the only medical society devoted solely to primary care. Family medicine's cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient-physician relationship focused on integrated care.

Thank you for your attention to this important health matter.

Respectfully,

Triin Minton, MD
President-Elect



Alaska Primary Care
ASSOCIATION

February 21, 2014

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov

The importance of vaccinations cannot be denied. From childhood immunizations to those for seniors, vaccinations save lives and protect the public's health.

Alaska's Community Health Center (CHC) system of 27 organizations and more than 160 clinic locations across the state serve more than 98,000 patients every year. And our primary care providers administer a very large number of immunizations.

Alaska's CHCs will be financially, administratively, and programmatically negatively affected by the termination of State of Alaska support for the Immunization Program (HB 310, SB 140) in June 2015.

You have proposed a solution, however, in Senate Bill 169 to establish a vaccine assessment account and implement a self-sustaining vaccine financing solution to preserve universal access to State-supplied vaccines.

The Alaska Primary Care Association energetically supports SB 169, as it will save money and time for our CHC primary care providers, as well as helping to ensure universal access to life-saving immunizations for Alaskans at all stages of their lives.

Sincerely,

Nancy Merriman
Executive Director

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE



Department of Health and Human Services

907-343-6718

Mayor Dan Sullivan

Senator Cathy Giessel
State Capitol, Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Giessel:

Our Department's Clinical Services includes the Disease Prevention and Control Section. This Section works primarily to treatment for tuberculosis as well as prevention through epidemiology. We support Senate Bill 169 which will lead to a self-sustaining vaccine financing solution for those whose insurance does not cover immunizations we consider essential to good public health.

As the State and even moreso, Anchorage, we have one of the lowest immunization rates nationally. Let's work toward becoming a state that is on the cutting edge like other states who have already successfully maintained universal access to state-supplied vaccines.

Our department serves 270,000 potential clients/citizens locally. We oftentimes see clients who are under insured and/or in a difficult situation where they are faced with the personal tough choice of good health for themselves, their children versus food on the table. We support Senate Bill 169 for a more efficient and cost-effective vaccination system that decreases administrative burden for health providers and increases access to all Alaskans.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Janet S. Vietmeier

Janet S. Vietmeier

cc: Kenneth Takakuwa, DHHS, Direct Services Division Manager
Kerre Shelton, SOA, Public Health Nursing, Director

Rosalyn Singleton MD
22423 Columbia Glacier Loop
Eagle River, AK
907-229-1989
907-729-3418
Ris2@cdc.gov

February 10, 2014

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



3340 Providence Dr. #500, Anchorage, AK 99508 / T. 907-562-2423 / F. 907-563-1170

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
MAILROOM

JAN 30 2014

HV

The Honorable Sean Parnell
Alaska State Capitol Building
PO Box 11001
Juneau AK 99811-0001

23 January 2014

Dear Governor Parnell


Anchorage Pediatric Group would like to encourage the formation of an Alaska Immunization Association, with the appropriate legislation.

As you are aware Alaska previously was a universal vaccine state. After the decrease in funding and the change to a VFC only State (Vaccines for Children). Our office had to develop a new process of purchasing, maintaining, and delivering private stock vaccines for the rest of our pediatric patients. This was an expensive decision in time, money and office resources. I know that many offices chose not to take on the additional difficulty and stopped providing immunizations.

Alaska has many barriers accessing medical care. Our already low immunization rates paired with a new barrier of a 2 tier system which makes it cumbersome to administer vaccines only adds to the problem. A Vaccine Association will help by streamlining the process for the state, providers, and patients alike. Studies have shown that many states have developed self-sustaining immunization programs that increase immunization rates while decreasing the overall cost(s) for everyone.

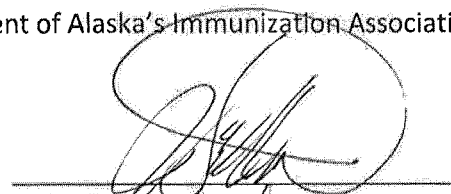
Please give careful consideration to the development of Alaska's Immunization Association


Respectfully,



Janet Alexander MD


Susan Beesley MD


Jody Butto MD FAAP


Jodi Elliot DO


Willow Monterrosa MD


Charles Ryan MD

George W. Brown, MD

Community Pediatrician

1640 Second Street Douglas, AK 99824 -5211 907 364 2726

gbrow177537@yahoo.com

Senators Stedman, Micciche, Ellis, Kelly, and Meyer
Senate Health and Social Services Committee
28th Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99801

February 19, 2014

Honorable Senators:

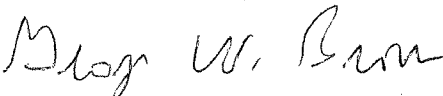
Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in strong support of SB 169 to assure effective vaccines will continue to be available for all Alaska citizens, especially children who are our real future. Thank you for your public service, a somber load where your decisions will guide our public future and where competing voices are respectfully heard as you have to make responsible decisions.

I am unable to speak in person for the Friday, February 21 hearing. Last year, you listened carefully as Dr. Hurlbert and I emphasized our personal 1960's – 1980's experiences of treating many children suffering severe infectious illnesses which are now fully preventable with current immunization resources. Such is an undeniable investment in the future health of our state. The savings in dollar costs and personal agony are magnified many times for the program costs. Establishing a lasting system which assures public and private partnership is a wise choice for which you will look back on your public service career with satisfaction.

As one Alaska citizen, I personally will be happy to pay state tax to underwrite such an investment if that becomes clearly necessary. Next to assuring access to public education for all Alaska children, which is the bed rock support of citizen guided democracy, preventing unnecessary infectious illnesses must remain our top priority.

As Senators Giessel's and French's leadership moves this bill through this session, I will follow its progress and do my best to testify in person as needed.

Respectfully,



George W. Brown, MD