

3/31/14

Dear Representative Gara,

I had the pleasure of meeting you several years ago at the March of Dimes Legislative Summit and I appreciate your track record as a champion for health care excellence here in Alaska. I am a pediatrician with the subspecialty of neonatology, the current Medical Director of the NICU at Providence. I am also the AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics)-Alaska Chapter President. I serve on the executive committee of the AAP Section on Perinatal Pediatrics, and I am on the March of Dimes Board of Directors.

I am writing to you today to encourage your strong support of SB 169 in the House Finance Committee. This is the bill which would create a vaccine commission, with a proposal for a universal purchase program for vaccines for Alaskans. **There is no doubt in my mind that this is essential for our state at this point in time.** Immunizations are one of very few public health measures that are proven to work. We are currently in a 3-year stop-gap coverage mode, which will end in 2015 and we must find a way to provide this essential need before this funding ends.

I recently returned from a national forum of leaders in pediatric care. I spoke with several physicians who have passed similar legislation in their states. All are extremely grateful that they have taken that route--for improvements in their immunizations rates, standardization of their processes, and in their cost savings. Alaska can now learn from the experience of others and move forward with the benefit of their groundwork.

I understand that there has been significant opposition from PHARMA to this bill in the House. I'd like to highlight 3 specific points:

1. Alaska had a 30 year history of federal funding for immunizations. The state is currently providing three years of interim funding, until we can craft a good permanent solution. This proposal will appropriately shift costs from the state to insurance payers, but ***the ability to purchase vaccines at a discount will benefit all of us (except perhaps the pharmaceutical companies,*** who will lose the benefit of Alaskans having to pay full price for their products. This is a great opportunity for a win-win public-private collaboration that assures a sound strategy for the future.
2. It is important to include adults in this program. There is more federal support for children's immunizations than for adults with gaps in coverage. We are grateful for help in taking care of our children, but ***we cannot afford to leave uninsured adults in our neighborhoods unprotected.*** Immunizations work partly by decreasing the burden of contagious infection on a community-wide basis. Prevention is always more cost-effective than treatment after someone gets sick and starts spreading it around.
3. Health care is getting more complex and the paperwork is getting more cumbersome every day. This is actually a proposal that will streamline our health care system and eliminate the costs of duplicate ordering, storage, and administrative tracking systems. ***Simplifying the system will reduce errors and decrease management costs.***

Please support this legislation, which will provide a healthy strategy for disease prevention in Alaska. Be careful of inaccuracies and misrepresentations in testimony from factions who will be treated fairly but will not benefit from this legislation. I wholeheartedly believe that this is a thoughtfully crafted proposal that will serve our state well.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns as a citizen and health care provider. As always, please feel welcome to contact me any time if I can be of service in legislative issues concerning the health of Alaska's children.

Respectfully,  
Lily Lou

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