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

Re: SB 169 – Statewide Immunization Program – Support

Dear Senator Giessel,

On behalf of AARP Alaska's 90,000 members, we are pleased to offer our support for the Statewide Immunization Program you establish through Senate Bill 169. We applaud your leadership, as well as Sen. French, which demonstrates concern for the public health of Alaskans along with a fiscally responsible public-private partnership to accomplish it.

AARP advocates for the needs and interests of older people, and among the primary concerns is access to and affordability of health care. Aging brings with it an increased vulnerability to a host of physical problems, many of which are related to compromised immune systems. Pneumonia, influenza, and shingles are common threats to the well-being of older people, and produce highly preventable episodes of disability and pain. While the numbers of people who receive vaccinations never equal the number who could benefit from them, the public health interests of our state are served by a well-coordinated, universal access program that does not depend on individual ability to pay or have health coverage that does. Moreover, the ability to provide immunizations throughout the network of senior care providers, such as senior centers, adult day programs, and community clinics, increase the likelihood that other health concerns will be noticed and addressed for elders that are often isolated or lack the mobility to access care.

We view the program outlined in SB 169 to be an effective model for cost containment, efficiency, and sensitivity to local (especially rural) needs. The ability of the Vaccination Assessment Council to negotiate bulk purchase, and to determine the most effective delivery system give the program a sustainable foundation for years to come. It is a model to which all parties contribute, and which provides benefit well beyond individual recipients. Public health is always in the best interest of our statewide community. We also emphasize our support for the inclusion of older adults in this program, as their susceptibilities to infection are a serious threat to their health and even their mortality.

We thank you for your work on this program, and look forward to passage and enactment of SB 169.

Respectfully,

Ken Helander
Advocacy Director
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Coordinator, AARP Capitol City Task Force
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