March of Dimes Foundation

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Janie Odgers State Director

April 4, 2013

To the Alaska Legislature:

On behalf of the March of Dimes, we are honored to support HB184 & SB87 and respectfully ask for your "yes" vote when this bill comes before your committee. This legislation would require all newborns in Alaska to be screened for Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD).

Quite simply, HB184 & SB87 will save lives. According to the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services is it estimated 1 in 100 babies will be born in the state with a congenital heart defect. For those infants, death can be prevented if the CCHD is detected and treated earlier.

The mission of the March of Dimes is to improve the health of women of childbearing age, infants, and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality. March of Dimes has been instrumental in expanding newborn screening and is supportive where there is a documented medical benefit to early detection, a reliable screening test, and early detection can be done through specific means, all of which exist for CCHD screening.

Congenital heart disease is the number one cause of infant deaths from birth defects. CCHD is a subgroup of congenital heart disease that affects approximately 4,800 babies born in the United States each year. Babies with CCHD have a heart defect that requires intervention, such as surgery, in the first few hours, days, or months of life. In September 2011, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services added screening for CCHD to the Recommended Uniform Screening Panel (RUSP). CCHD screening is done through a simple, non-invasive test called "pulse oximetry" that can detect CCHD before a baby shows signs of the condition, allowing for the proper treatment to be given to prevent disability or death.

Therefore, in order to ensure Alaska's newborn screening panel include all conditions recommended by the RUSP, we respectfully ask that HB184 & SB87 be amended to include the word "critical" before "congenital heart disease" and that you vote in favor of HB184 & SB87. Thank you for your efforts to protect the lives of babies born in Alaska and we look forward to working with you on this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

Janie Odgers State Director

