



March 16, 2015

Honorable Bill Walker
Governor, State of Alaska
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99511-0001

Dear Governor Walker,

On behalf of Alaska's 13,000 education support professionals and teachers, in order to improve the health, safety, and well-being of our 130,000 public school students, I am writing to affirm NEA-Alaska's support of Medicaid expansion in Alaska.

Some may not see Medicaid expansion as an education issue. As someone who taught in our schools for over 30 years with some of Anchorage's most at-risk students, including at Clark Middle School and the McLaughlin Youth Center, I can tell you that the lack of access to quality, affordable healthcare in our communities directly impacts too many Alaskan children. When I taught at Clark and McLaughlin, I went to work every day to help as many of my students as possible to succeed and turn their lives around. I wish I could tell you that all of them did, but that is not the world we live in.

In 2014, NEA-Alaska partnered with the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Alaska PTA, United Way of Anchorage, Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children, and a number of other partners to commission a statewide study by Northern Economics on the social and environmental issues that are impacting student learning and achievement in Alaska. The results were clear: parents and teachers alike found that student learning was severely impacted by a number of issues outside the classroom, such as poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence. These issues leave children without safe and supportive home environments, which can lead to chronic absence, a lack of academic preparation, and low levels of student achievement.

Too many of my students had the deck stacked against them by these social and economic factors. Would Medicaid expansion solve all these issues? No, but it would surely help some of our most disadvantaged students. Medicaid expansion is no silver bullet, but it would reduce the number of uninsured Alaskans by half – extending health coverage to more than 40,000 low-income Alaskans. Many of these new enrollees will *not* have dependent children (some will, but many low-income children are already covered by Medicaid and Denali KidCare), but expanding health coverage in low-income communities and neighborhoods will improve the quality of life for all the children who live in them.

By most estimates, Medicaid expansion will bring \$1.1 billion in new federal revenue into Alaska. It will create 4,000 new jobs, \$1.2 billion more in wages and salaries, and \$2.49 billion in increased economic activity across Alaska. In addition, Medicaid expansion will create millions in cost savings for the state of Alaska at a time when we are searching for ways to close a projected \$3.5 billion budget deficit.

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As educators, we are deeply committed to the success of every one of our students. Medicaid expansion will be good for the state, it will be good for the economy, but for us this issue comes down to one simple statement: Medicaid expansion will be good for our students.

Thank you for taking action on one of the most important public policy issues that will affect Alaska's students this legislative session.

Sincerely,



Ron Fuhrer
President

cc: Alaska Legislature