



**MAT-SU HEALTH
FOUNDATION**

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March 28, 2012

Senator Johnny Ellis
Alaska State Capitol, Room 103
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Mat-Su Health Foundation support for SB 221

Dear Senator Ellis:

Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) is the official business name of Valley Hospital Association, Inc., which shares ownership in Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. MSHF invests its assets into charitable works to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in Mat-Su. MSHF has identified substance abuse as a focus area for our philanthropic work and is a member of the Mat-Su Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition and a funder of Recover AK. Both of these coalitions are concentrating on reducing and preventing alcohol abuse.

According to the Center for Disease Control's Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System data for AK over the last decade, adult binge drinking rates have ranged from 16 to 19% and proportion of heavy drinkers from four to seven percent. These stats contribute to one of the highest state rates of alcohol dependence in the nation. These rates impact Alaska's suicide, domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, motor vehicle crash, and crime rates as well as contribute to lost productivity for employers. According to the 2005 report from the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the economic impact on Alaska from substance abuse is estimated at \$738 million annually in health care costs, traffic crashes, criminal justice, public assistance and lost productivity.

Representative Lisa Murkowski's sponsor statement for the state alcohol tax explained that the fund "would help provide revenue needed for the expanded treatment, therapeutic courts, diversion programs and other initiatives." Whereas the legislative intent of the tax is clear, only 50% of the collected funds have been applied to treatment, prevention and other efforts related to alcohol abuse.

Taxing alcohol is an environmental strategy to reduce consumption. Applying 100% of these tax revenues for additional environmental strategies to reduce the misuse and abuse of alcohol will help more Alaskan families to enjoy greater quality of life; more Alaskan children to thrive in their homes and schools; and Alaska businesses to enjoy more productivity and income.

The MSHF Board of Directors supports SB 221, which would allocate 100 percent of existing alcohol tax revenue to the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Treatment and Prevention (ADTP) fund. We commend your efforts to advance this cause and your help in creating a healthier Alaska.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ripley
Executive Director
Mat-Su Health Foundation