

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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North to the Future

Senator Cathy Giessel

Senate District N

SB 128 would establish a Marijuana Education & Treatment Fund in the state of Alaska. This fund would be administered by the Division of Public Health and be modeled after the Tobacco Use Education and Cessation Fund that was established in 2001.

The newly organized and commercialized marijuana industry is Alaska's newest tax payer and is projected to supply the state approximately \$9 million per year in taxes. This legislation would direct 25% of those tax proceeds to the fund annually.

The marijuana education and treatment fund will be an account within the general fund to which the legislature may appropriate money, the amount of which would be guided by a request provided by the Department of Health and Social Services to fund the components of the program. The fund would allow DHSS to use the tax proceeds in the following ways:

- Create a community-based misuse prevention program and a youth services program
- Promote public education to discourage youth initiation to marijuana, educate about the effects of marijuana and inform the public on marijuana laws
- Survey/track population for knowledge, awareness, and attitudes re: marijuana use
- Monitor use and its effect on the health of the populace in general
- Create substance abuse screening, intervention, referral and treatment programs

So why establish this fund? We need a way to monitor use of this drug statewide, respond with targeted public education and provide resources for poison control and the treatment programs associated with the misuse of marijuana. If we do not, Alaska will be unable to adequately address this emerging public health issue. Currently it is reported that more Alaska youth are now smoking marijuana than tobacco cigarettes; early and prolonged usage can lead to abnormal brain development, addiction, mental health and cognitive disabilities. And use during pregnancy is very much a concern for the developing baby.

In Colorado, pediatric hospital visits relating to marijuana doubled after legalization, and their poison center evaluations increased 5-fold as well. Oregon, Colorado and Washington have all funded programs in their states to aid in public education re: marijuana use/misuse as well as funding for screening and treatment programs. We can learn from their experiences, and creating a funding mechanism via SB 128 will get us started.

Chair Senate Resources Committee Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov