

# Alaska State Legislature

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## **REPRESENTATIVE Paul Seaton**

District 35

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### **HCR 5**

#### **Sponsor Statement**

#### **Short Title: A resolution relating to prevention of disease and to vitamin D.**

HCR 5 urges the State of Alaska to adopt a disease prevention model of health and to increase the awareness of the preventative benefits of vitamin D supplementation, and increase vitamin D availability to reduce health impacts and costs.

Mounting scientific evidence shows a correlation between vitamin D sufficiency and significant decrease in incidence of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic pain, Seasonal Affective Disorder, oral disease, influenza, upper respiratory illness, tuberculosis, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, fractures in the elderly, autism, rickets, pregnancy complications, and hepatitis C.

For seven months out of the year, the sun angle is too low for Alaskans to be able to produce vitamin D from sunlight. Partly due to this long “vitamin D winter,” Alaska has some of the lowest blood serum levels of vitamin D in the country. Correspondingly, Alaska also has relatively high rates of chronic disease. For example, according to the Alaska Division of Public Health, chronic diseases (cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, and stroke, respectively) make up four of the top five causes of death in the state. These diseases come at a great cost both socially and financially to our state.

Deficiency in vitamin D may contribute heavily to this steep social and financial cost. Two studies mentioned in HCR 5 demonstrate this. The first one, examining the economic burden of vitamin D deficiency, estimated that Canada could lower the death rate by 37,000 deaths and save \$14.4 billion dollars per year by increasing the national average of vitamin D blood serum levels. The second, similar study showed that the United States could have 50,000—63,000 fewer deaths and save \$40-56 billion per year with sufficient population levels of vitamin D.

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With higher rates of chronic disease in northern latitudes, and fewer and fewer federal dollars coming in to cover the escalating healthcare and Medicaid costs in Alaska, it is imperative to prevent—rather than just treat—chronic disease. Prevention of chronic disease is a matter of lifestyle: healthy diet, frequent exercise, and adequate levels of vitamins and nutrients. Most people understand this, but are unaware that vitamin D deficiency needs to be addressed in every community of this state.

HCR 5 asks Governor Sean Parnell to establish “prevention of disease” as a primary model of health care in Alaska, and for the Department of Health and Social Services and health care providers to increase attention to vitamin D deficiency and promote supplementation. It also asks the Department to provide vitamin D supplements to the elderly, children, and pregnant women. Vitamin D supplementation is a low-cost measure that could help save lives, and significantly improve the health of many Alaskans, while saving millions of dollars in health treatment costs.