

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BERTA GARDNER SENATE DEMOCRATIC LEADER SENATE DISTRICT I

Sponsor Statement SB 53: An Act Expanding Access to Birth Control

All across Alaska, women working in rural areas, in the tourism industry, in the military, and on the North Slope, do not always have ready access to women's health services, thereby posing limitations on their ability to control whether and when they conceive children. SB 53 would require insurance companies to pay at the request of the consumer both private and Medicaid claims and reimburse health care providers for 12 month supply of contraceptives, including but not limited to birth control pills and hormonal contraceptive patches. Additionally, SB 53 includes an exemption for religious employers in order to ensure First Amendment protections.

Unintended pregnancy has a profound effect on the economic opportunities and overall well-being of Alaskans statewide. Unintended pregnancy mainly results from not using contraception, or from inconsistent or incorrect use of effective contraceptive methods. Unintended pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of problems for both the mother and baby. If a pregnancy is not planned before conception, a woman may not be in optimal health for childbearing, and might make poor prenatal choices due to a lack of resources or a family support system, unaddressed issues with drug and alcohol dependence, and an absence of nutritional knowledge that might otherwise keep both mother and child healthy through the prenatal experience.

Along with these health concerns, unintended pregnancy is an economic issue for Alaskan families, as well as the state Department of Health and Social Services. Nationally, 51% of all US births in 2010 were paid for by public insurance through Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Indian Health Service. Public insurance programs paid for 68% of the 1.5 million unplanned births that year, compared with 38% of planned births. Two million births were publicly funded in 2010; of those, about half were unplanned. Alaska data is consistent with national trends.

I invited you to discuss this issue with me further and encourage you to support this legislation.