

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Bill 216—Dementia Awareness

Sponsor Statement

Senate Bill 234 addresses the growing number of people living with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias by directing the Department of Health and Social Services to develop a statewide dementia awareness program with the goal of educating the public about the importance of early detection, diagnosis, and treatment.

Fewer than half of Americans living with Alzheimer’s disease receive a formal diagnosis, meaning that many Alaskans with dementia have yet to receive a diagnosis, which further delays valuable treatment options. Senate Bill 234 is intended to improve the rate of diagnosis for dementia in Alaska and to educate clinicians, health professionals, and the public on the early warning signs of dementia.

Alzheimer’s disease is one of ten types of dementia and is the ninth leading cause of death for Alaskans. More than 12,500 Alaskans are currently living with dementia, and with the implementation of a statewide dementia awareness program, the number of Alaskans who receive an early diagnosis is expected to increase.

The creation of a dementia awareness campaign will help diagnose those suffering from dementia and help Alaska be prepared for what has been called “the most underrated threat to public health in the 21st century.” Additionally, the creation of the dementia awareness program within the Department of Health and Social Services will position the state to receive federal funding for dementia education, which is available through the 2018 federal legislation known as the “Building Our Largest Dementia Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act,” or the BOLD Act.