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POSITION PAPER

HOUSE BILL NO. 550

"An Act relating to premarital blood tests; and providing for an effective date."

This Bill amends AS 25.05.101 by adding a new subsection stating that a blood test for syphilis is not required for the issuance of a premarital certificate.

In calendar year 1983, a total of 51 cases of syphilis in all stages was reported. Of these 32 were in the infectious stage. The rate for all cases of syphilis for 1982 was about 12.2 and 10.4 for 1983. Since 1973, Alaska's syphilis rate has been consistently lower than the rate for the U.S. as a whole. The 1980 U.S. rate was 30.18.

Premarital testing is no longer an effective case finding tool. Between 1975 and 1980, a total of about 60,000 premarital specimens were tested with a yield of only two cases of previously unknown infectious syphilis. In 1982, one case was found in a total of about 12,000 premarital tests. In recent years, about 65% of new cases of syphilis in Alaska have occurred in the homosexual population, a group not ordinarily reached through a premarital testing program. Most cases are detected through self-referral of symptomatic persons or through epidemiologic investigation of sexual contacts of detected cases.

Historically, the major purpose of premarital testing was the prevention of congenital syphilis. The existing Alaska statute became effective in 1949 when syphilis was much more common with over 100 cases per year.

Passage of this Bill would have no effect on VD control efforts in the State. Prenatal testing will continue as a preventive measure for congenital syphilis. Syphilis testing will still be available to private health care providers and to the sexually transmitted disease clinics. Efforts will continue to be directed at high risk groups and known associates and contacts of person with the disease in an infectious stage.

Passage of this legislation is supported by the Alaska Public Health Association, the Alaska State Medical Association, the Alaska State Hospital Association and the Alaska Native Board of Health. Opposition has been voiced by the Faith Hospital in Glenallen.

The intent of this Bill is similar to that of SB 343. The Department of Health and Social Services prefers SB 343 because it deletes all references to the need for premarital health certificates as a condition for

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the issuance of a marriage license while HB 550 leaves intact such references in AS 25.05.091, AS 25.05.101, AS 25.05.105, AS 25.05.131, AS 25.05.141, AS 25.05.151, AS 25.05.181, AS 25.05.201, AS 25.05.221 and AS 25.05.341.

Recommended by: (Acting) Philip J. Jones
E.S. Rabeau, M.D. Director
Division of Public Health

Date: 2/9/84

Approved by: Robert London Smith
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Commissioner
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Date: 2/10/84