



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

**Department of
Health and Social Services**

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 25, 2019

Senator Cathy Giessel
Alaska State Capitol, Room 111
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1182

Subject: ACoA Support SB 37, Renewal of Vaccine Assessment Program

Dear Senator Giessel:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to express our support for SB 37 to renew the statewide immunization program that provides recommended vaccines for all Alaskans at no additional charge to patients. This legislation, authored by you, utilizes a successful public/private partnership business model established in 2014 that allows the program to be self-sustaining with revenues collected from assessment fees paid by health insurance payers and savings resulting from the state's bulk purchase of vaccine supplies at a reduced cost. Moreover, this program uses no undesignated general funds. Although SB 37 addresses the immunization needs of all Alaskans, our comments will focus on the benefits of this legislation we perceive for older Alaskans.

Preventative services, such as immunizations, are important tools for maintaining the health of all Alaskans at every stage of life. Immune systems weaken with age, which places older people at risk for severe illnesses from pneumonia, influenza, and shingles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccines for these conditions for all people over the age of 60. Vaccines for pneumonia, influenza, and shingles are included in the statewide immunization program as proposed by SB 37. Alaska's statewide immunization program improves access to these select vaccines for seniors who are low-income, older persons not eligible for Medicare, and for seniors who receive services by providers who do not accept Medicare. Deaths from pneumonia and influenza are highest among older age groups.

According to data from the Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, 70.9% of Alaskans age 65+ utilized the pneumonia vaccine in 2017 compared to 64.1% in 2013. In addition, 50.5% seniors (age 65+) received the influenza vaccine compared to 52.4% in 2013. BRFSS data also reports 37.8% of Alaskans age 50+ received the shingles vaccine in 2014 (with no other years reporting). Mortality rates for influenza/pneumonia among older Alaskans (age 65+) have declined from 81.9 in 2010 to 71.1 in 2017. While these findings are not conclusive about the benefits of the statewide immunization program for seniors, nor do they indicate the percentage of seniors who receive vaccines through the statewide immunization program, the data shows promising trends of an increasing utilization of the pneumonia vaccine for those age 65+ and lower mortality rates among seniors from influenza/pneumonia over time.

The statewide immunization program also assists a growing number of Alaskan seniors who are grandparents raising grandchildren on a fixed income with limited insurance coverage. They desire healthy grandchildren who have access to recommended immunizations recognized by public health standards and required for school admission. Rather than seeing their grandchildren go without immunizations, many grandparents will make personal and financial sacrifices to insure their grandchildren receive the recommended immunizations. The statewide immunization program helps to relieve the economic burden on grandparents and improve access to vaccines for children being raised by grandparents with modest incomes.

The Alaska Commission on Aging supports SB 37 to continue the statewide immunization program utilizing an innovative public-private partnership that is cost effective for improving health outcomes for all Alaskans. We thank you for your leadership on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Gordon Glaser
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director