

Protecting the Health of Alaskans

“The Health, Education and Social Services Committee faced many difficult challenges during this session. Balancing the needs and wants of those in metropolitan and rural areas was complicated by the need to reduce state spending and find program efficiencies. We were very deliberative in our decision making because every cut and change has a real impact on the people of Alaska. Despite our many challenges and often conflicting viewpoints, we accomplished a great deal. The re-organization of the Department of Health and Social Services will enable those who need assistance to find it in one place rather than having to go from one department to another. Our committee worked to maintain Medicaid coverage for the breast and cervical cancer treatment of women without insurance, and we supported HCR 8, which creates ‘Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week.’ We also encouraged more qualified nurses to come to Alaska by adding Registered Nurses to the housing loan program for teachers, SB 25. Although we had tough issues to deal with, we did our best to find compromise solutions that help the most people and hurt the fewest.”



Rep. Peggy Wilson
Chair, House Health, Education and Social Services Committee

The Republican-led Majority has made great strides in actively promoting and protecting the health and well-being of Alaskan families and children through legislation and program funding during the first session of the Twenty-Third Alaska Legislature. The Majority took action to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for all Alaskans; fought to contain the cost of prescription drugs as well as protect consumers from overdosing and from fraudulent pharmacists; worked to protect Alaskan children; and offered incentives to attract qualified health professionals to the state.

Working for More Accessible, Affordable Healthcare for Alaskans

- **HB 10** enables small businesses, non-profits, and the self-employed to form pools for group health insurance with potentially more affordable rates.
- **HB 195** eliminates some group health insurance mandates from policies to individuals, allowing health insurance companies to offer more affordable coverage to individuals.
- **HB 260** helps healthcare professionals, predominantly those who have retired, offer free services to Alaskans in need.
- **SB 78** maintains the Medicaid coverage for the treatment of women who suffer from breast or cervical cancer but do not have insurance and provides coverage for women diagnosed in the future. This program was slated to end June 30, 2003.

Fighting Fraud and Reducing Costs

- **HB 51** protects patients from overdosing on the same drug by requiring the generic name be included on the label.
- **HB 270** protects the public from fraudulent pharmacists keeping those guilty of fraud or deceit from being licensed in Alaska.
- **SB 41** provides the legal tools for the fiduciaries of the Medicaid program to establish program integrity and maintain maximum fiscal control.
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Protecting Alaskan Children and Families

- **HCR 8** raises awareness and helps protect our children from the dangers of poisons and inhalants by making March 16-22, 2003 Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week.
- **HB 92** helps protect children from abuse and neglect by adding clergy to the list of those who are mandated to report abuse to the authorities.
- **HB 229** authorizes a SARS control program.
- **SCR 4** proclaims November 2003 as Avalanche Awareness month.

Encouraging Qualified Alaskan Healthcare Providers

- **HB 211** establishes the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program as an incentive to attract new nurses to the state and to encourage Alaskans to pursue nursing vocations in Alaska.
- **HB 71** extends the Board of Midwives, which licenses midwives and enforces safe care standards, and ensures that midwifery can be covered by Medicaid, which offers more care options for less affluent Alaskans.
- **HB 74** extends the Board of Nurses, which ensures our nurses are qualified and takes disciplinary action when necessary.
- **HB 135** improves regulation of marital and family therapists, brings parity to the state's mental health professionals, and protects Alaskans seeking professional counsel.
- **SB 157** requires the Department of Health and Social Services to use in-state facilities, where available, for the psychiatric treatment of eligible persons.

Successful Legislation

House Concurrent Resolution 8: Inhalants & Poisons Awareness Week

Sponsor: Rep. Kapsner

HCR 8 declares March 16 - 22, 2003, to be Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week.

Passed the House and Senate

House Bill 10: Group Health Insurance for Private Groups

Sponsors: Reps. Heinze and Rokeberg

HB 10 allows non-affiliated employers, including non-profit businesses and the self-employed, to be eligible for group health insurance, which allows employees to include dependent family members in their health insurance coverage. Now, a pool of non-affiliated employers can form an association to become eligible for group health coverage.

Passed the House

House Bill 25: Health Care Services Directives

Sponsor: Rep. Weyrauch

HB 25 offers a "comprehensive simplified" alternative to the power of attorney enacted in Alaska in 1996 relating to health care services and directives for the terminally ill patient. The legislation is comprehensive because it speaks to the details and instructions that patients put in place regarding their care should they become incapacitated. It is unique among all other living will and health agent forms because it looks to all of a patient's needs: medical, personal, emotional and spiritual.

Passed the House

House Bill 51: Labeling of Prescribed Drugs

Sponsor: Rep. Seaton

HB 51 requires state pharmacists to include the generic drug name on containers of a brand name drug. The requirement aims to inform people of a brand name drug's generic name and prevent them from mistakenly overdosing on the same drug.

Passed the House

House Bill 71: Regulation/Extension of the Board of Midwives

Sponsor: House State Affairs

HB 71 extends the Board of Midwives until June 30, 2007. The board serves both to make sure people practicing midwifery are aware of the level of experience and education expected of them and to hold them accountable to an established standard of care. Women seeking an alternative to hospital care for normal pregnancy and birth rely on the diligence of the board to enhance both the quality and accessibility of their healthcare. One notable enhancement: the board worked with the State of Alaska to establish Medicaid procedures for CDM services, thereby placing Alaska among eight states which both license their traditional midwives and provide Medicaid reimbursement for their services.

Passed the House and Senate

House Bill 74: Extend Board of Nursing

Sponsor: Rep. Dahlstrom

HB 74 extends the Board of Nursing to June 30, 2007. Otherwise the board would have terminated on June 30, 2003. The board establishes the minimum education and work experience requirements that individuals must meet to become licensed nurses or certified nursing aides. The board also investigates complaints against licensed professionals and takes disciplinary licensing action when appropriate.

Signed into Law

House Bill 92: Clergy to Report Child Abuse

Sponsor: Rep. Lynn

HB 92 adds clergy to the list of people mandated by law to report child abuse to the appropriate authorities. It is essential that children be protected from the abuse of sexual predators. Several classes of persons, such as nurses and teachers, are currently mandated to report actual or suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities. The bill does recognize and address the unique character of “penitential communication”. HB 92 adds to the protection of child safety, and enhances the beneficial work and reputation of the faith community.

Passed the House

House Bill 135: Marital & Family Therapists

Sponsor: Rep. Wilson

HB 135 adds the Board of Marital and Family Therapy to the list of boards that may request the Division of Occupational Licensing to contract for substance abuse treatment under licensed therapists. HB 135 gives the Board of Marital and Family Therapy authority to order a licensed marital and family therapist to submit to a reasonable physical or mental examination if the board has credible evidence sufficient to conclude that the therapist’s physical or mental capacity to practice safely is at issue, allows for individual client contact to be used as hours toward licensing, requires the therapist to communicate to a potential victim or law enforcement officer if a threat of imminent serious physical harm to an identified victim has been made by a client, and imposes disciplinary sanctions with regard to therapist sexual misconduct. HB 135 not only brings parity to the mental health professions in the state, it also adds additional consumer protection for Alaskans seeking professional counsel.

Passed the House and Senate

House Bill 187: Extend Board of Storage Tank Assistance

Sponsor: House Rules Committee

HB 187 extends the Board of Storage Tank Assistance to June 30, 2007. The board (BSTA) helps the owners and operators of underground storage tanks (UST's) to comply with state and federal regulations enacted in response to nationwide concern over possible contamination of drinking water from leaking tanks. These regulations cover areas including the design, construction and installation of new tanks, and tightened standards for the retrofitting of existing tanks.

Passed the House and Senate

House Bill 195: Individual Health Care Insurance

Sponsor: Rep. Rokeberg

HB 195 gives insurance companies the authority to offer an individual health insurance plan that does not provide coverage for all of the insurance mandates currently required in state statute, thus giving Alaskans a more affordable health insurance option. HB 195 will make mandates an optional part of individual health insurance. Some examples of state health insurance mandates are: coverage for services of midwives, substance abuse treatment, and acupuncture. Current law requires that all insurance plans include these types of coverage; however, individual insurance underwriting is different from group insurance plans, which are not included in HB 195. Individual plans have higher premiums and are tailored to the person’s circumstances; therefore, a single man who buys individual health care does not need coverage for services of midwives. HB 195 also amends the Alaska Comprehensive Health Insurance Association (ACHIA) statutes to make certain Alaskans eligible for health care assistance under the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002 (TAA). The TAA will provide a 65-percent credit from the U.S. Department of Treasury for health insurance to Alaskans who lose their jobs because of foreign imports, such as oil or salmon.

Passed the House and Senate

House Bill 211: Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program

Sponsor: Rep. Wilson

HB 211 establishes the Alaska Nurse Recruitment Loan Repayment Program as an incentive to attract new nurses to the state and encourage Alaskans to pursue nursing vocations in Alaska. The program offers up to \$2,000 per year, not to exceed \$10,000 to repay nursing loans.

Passed the House

House Bill 260: Immunity for Providing Free Healthcare

Sponsor: Rep. Seaton

HB 260 extending the ability of licensed physicians and other health care providers to administer health care services free of charge. By exempting such services from malpractice liability, HB 260 would allow health care providers to donate their professional services at a lower personal cost. HB 260 will be especially helpful to retiring health professionals that wish to donate their services but do not still carry medical malpractice insurance.

Passed the House

House Bill 270: Pharmacist Licensing

Sponsor: Rep. Dahlstrom

HB 270 gives the Board the authority to deny a license to a new applicant if they find that the applicant has committed fraud, deceit, falsely advertised, convicted of a felony, etc. as listed in Alaska statute.

Passed the House and Senate

Senate Bill 41: Medicaid Costs and Crimes

Sponsor: Sen. Green

SB 41 provides the legal tools for the fiduciaries of the Medicaid program to establish program integrity and maintain maximum fiscal control.

Passed the House and Senate

Senate Bill 78: Medicaid for Breast & Cervical Cancer

Sponsor: Rep. Green

HB 107 removes the sunset provision for Medicaid coverage to women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer detected by federal screening programs that are provided under the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Act. The provision was set to end coverage on June 30, 2003.

Signed into Law

Senate Bill 157: Inpatient Psychiatric Services

Sponsor: Sen. Green

SB 157 requires the Department of Health and Social Services to use in-state facilities, where available, for the psychiatric treatment of eligible persons.

Passed the House and Senate