

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

REPRESENTATIVE BRUCE WEYHRAUCH

ALASKA  
STATE CAPITOL  
JUNEAU, ALASKA  
99801-1182

(907) 465-3744  
FAX (907) 465-2273



## SPONSOR STATEMENT FOR HOUSE BILL 312

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are a scourge to our society and 100% preventable. FASDs are the most common cause of mental retardation in Alaska's children, causing permanent birth defects, retarding brain function, arrested emotional and physical development, causing poor behavior, deformed facial features, and harming learning and sleeping patterns. It is deplorable that Alaska ranks first in the United States for the highest number of children born with FASD.

Each child born in Alaska with FASD costs millions of dollars over the life of that child. A 2005 study conducted by the McDowell Group estimates the total lifetime costs for providing services to an individual with FAS are estimated at \$3.1 million. This drain on limited funds covers special education services or assistance for health services, and juvenile and adult justice costs. Eliminating FASD in children born in Alaska is in the best interests of the public.

House Bill 312 requires a newborn to be screened for alcohol exposure. This is an important piece of information that can lead to an early diagnosis. Early diagnosis reduces the risk of problems in life associated with FASD, including troubles at school, with substance abuse and with the law.

Additionally, this legislation also mandates an aggressive public education campaign. It requires hospitals and schools to distribute information on preventing FASD, and tasks the State Department of Education with developing the materials and sponsoring a public education campaign on FASD.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders are a problem of massive proportion to our state. FASD affects those who suffer from it, their families and love ones, communities and our state as a whole physically, emotionally, and financially. I offer House Bill 312 as a step towards the goal of eradicating this plague that causes such sorrow and anguish for our Alaskan children.