



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Republicans Lop Off Denali KidCare Families Fewer Pregnant Women and Children to Receive Assistance

JUNEAU – Senate Republicans today voted to cut some pregnant women and poor children from the nationally acclaimed Denali KidCare program. Denali KidCare is a state-sponsored safety net for uninsured Alaskans; eligibility for the program is tied to the federal poverty level.

The immediate effect of the change in the coming year, argued Democratic Senators, will be 123 pregnant women forced to drop from the program. In just six years the number of women left behind will rise to 205 per year. During the same time frame 801 children would be left behind.

The vote today was not a vote on the original Murkowski-Leman Senate Bill 105. The vote today on SB 105 included an amendment offered by Fairbanks Senator Gary Wilken to make it even harder to qualify for the program than the governor wanted.

“I’m begging my colleagues not to make things more difficult for pregnant women,” said Senate Democratic Leader Johnny Ellis (D-Anchorage), who argued against the bill.

Senator Gretchen Guess (D-Anchorage), an economic analyst, illustrated her opposition to the measure by noting the documented costs of failing to provide prenatal care during pregnancies. Senator Hollis French (D-Anchorage) countered arguments about cost-containment: “You don’t blame the costs of care on the people who need the care.” Senator Bettye Davis (D-Anchorage) noted the state receives federal funds as a direct result of the success of Denali KidCare.

In contrast, Wasilla Senator Lyda Green argued that lawmakers should be encouraging people to be privately insured. The measure passed 12 to 7 on a straight party-line vote.

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Sen. Bettye Davis, Sen. Johnny Ellis, Sen. Kim Elton, Sen. Lyman Hoffman, Sen. Hollis French, Sen. Gretchen Guess, Sen. Georgianna Lincoln, Sen. Donny Olson, Rep. Ethan Berkowitz, Rep. Sharon Cissna, Rep. Harry Crawford, Rep. Eric Croft, Rep. Les Gara, Rep. Max Gruenberg, Rep. David Guttenberg, Rep. Reggie Joule, Rep. Mary Kapsner, Rep. Beth Kerttula, Rep. Albert Kookesh, Rep. Carl Moses