



Alaska State Legislature

House and Senate Democratic Caucus

Official Business, State Capitol, Juneau, Alaska, 99801

May 14, 2003

The Honorable Frank Murkowski
Governor, State of Alaska
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Governor Murkowski:

We are writing to urge you to veto Senate Bill 105, a bill to limit eligibility for the nationally acclaimed Denali KidCare program. The effects of Senate Bill 105 are drastic and will result in over 1200 children and 120 pregnant women being dropped from the program in 2004 and a substantial increase in the number of ineligible pregnant women and children in the years following.

This bill freezes the income levels at the 2003 Federal Poverty Guidelines while also rolling back eligibility for the program from 200% to 175% of the 2003 Federal Poverty Guidelines. While freezing income levels is shortsighted, rolling back eligibility so that children who currently have health insurance will lose their coverage is objectionable. We are strongly opposed to this legislation.

The effect of this legislation is to punish the children of Alaska and disproportionately affect a segment of our population that is least able to adjust to the changes. As policymakers, we believe we are charged with the responsibility of creating policies with the best interests of all Alaskans in mind. We have a simple test for all proposals; do they put Alaskans first and do they move Alaska forward? Denali KidCare has been hugely successful, with 95% of eligible children in 2001 using the program. There is no need to modify or change the current program. We intended to address the health care crisis in Alaska with this program and recognized that in doing so our children, who are our future, would be healthier and more productive individuals.

In addition, the families affected will likely go without health care until it is an emergency situation, an outcome that is far more expensive than preventative health care. Studies have shown time and time again that preventative health care produces the most savings over time. For example, uninsured children are four times as likely to go without medical care than insured children with the same needs. When the problem is finally addressed the child is sicker and more likely to end up in the emergency room.

We should not be balancing the budget on the backs of Alaska's most needy citizens. The children of Alaska are our future and our wisest investment.

The bill that will come across your desk is significantly different and much more harmful than the proposal you sent to the legislature. We suggest we go back and review all the proposals during the interim and revisit this issue next session.

Again, we respectfully request you veto Senate Bill 105.

Sincerely,

Senator Johnny Ellis

Representative Ethan Berkowitz

Senator Bettye Davis

Senator Kim Elton

Senator Hollis French

Senator Gretchen Guess

Senator Lyman Hoffman

Senator Georgianna Lincoln

Senator Donny Olson

Representative Sharon Cissna

Representative Harry Crawford

Representative Eric Croft

Representative Les Gara

Representative Max Gruenberg

Representative David Guttenberg

Representative Reggie Joule

Representative Mary Kapsner

Representative Beth Kerttula

Representative Albert Kookesh

Representative Carl Moses