



Alaska State Legislature House and Senate Democrats

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Rep. Joule Introduces Infant Hearing Test Bill

Bill stresses the importance of healthy newborn development

JUNEAU--Representative Reggie Joule (D-Kotzebue) introduced a bill today that would require newborns and infants to be screened for hearing loss.

"Early detection, intervention and support are key components to insure a positive future for our children," Joule said. "Infant hearing screening is just one simple step we can take to protect infants from developmental impairments by identifying hearing loss early-on."

Each year, approximately 30 to 40 of the 10,000 babies born in Alaska are likely to have some type of congenital hearing loss. Many times newborns with hearing loss will not be identified until 18 months of age -this is after certain critical periods for language and cognitive development have passed.

The proposed legislation would require infants born in hospitals to undergo an audiological examination before being released. Infants born in birthing centers, hospitals with less than 50 deliveries a year, or at home must be referred within three months to a facility that can perform the screening.

Joule's bill also provides for on-going follow-up care and family support services. Throughout the process, parents will be notified of government and community sponsored assistance programs. Also outlined in the bill is the establishment of a reporting and tracking system in order to provide the Department of Health and Social Services with information to effectively plan, establish, monitor, and evaluate progress.

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