

Week Six Legislative Report - prepared by Caren Robinson

February 12th - February 17th 2001

1st Regular Session of the Twenty-Second Alaska Legislature

**\*\*ACTION ALERT\*\*\*\*EXPRESS YOURSELF TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE\*\*\*\***

Your input is needed to support two important pieces of legislation positively impacting women's health.

SB 38 Moves to Senate Health Education and Social Services Committee

SB 38 (Governor) Medical Assistance: Breast/Cervical Cancer moved from the

Senate (L&C) this week as expected. This bill would provide for treatment for women who require it after free screening identifies abnormalities.

However, it is anticipated to be a harder sell in the next committee Senate HESS. Senator Green who chairs Senate HESS has stated her opposition to the bill.

Senator Leman wants to amend the bill to create a new "catastrophic health insurance plan" for all uninsured Alaskans funded with a PFD check-off. The uninsured would be required to use their dividend to buy a catastrophic plan.

**Senators Need to Hear From You**

It is time to get letters, POMs and calls to all members of the Senate Health Education and Social Services Committee (HESS). This bill will not move forward without the Committee understanding there is broad and vocal support.

So please act this week and contact all members of the Senate HESS committee.

Legislative Home Page with individual legislators contact information: [www.legis.st.ak.us](http://www.legis.st.ak.us)

**SB 15 Contraceptive Coverage: Time to Request a Hearing !!**

Senators Ellis and Davis have introduced SB 15, the Prescription Fairness Act, to require all Alaska health insurers that cover prescription drugs to include coverage for contraceptives.

Contraception is basic health care for women, and a critical contributor to improved maternal and child health. Yet many insurers have relied on women and their families to pay out of pocket for contraceptive services and supplies, forcing financial decisions that may result in the use of less effective or less medically appropriate contraceptive methods.

Contraceptives enhance women's health preventing unintended pregnancy, and reducing the need for abortion. Improving private insurance coverage for contraceptive services will increase access to contraception and reduce barriers to effective family planning.

The absence of prescription contraceptive coverage is largely responsible for the fact that women spend 68 percent more in out-of-pocket expenses for health care than men.

In December, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a decision finding merit in a discrimination case alleging violations of Title VII (the Pregnancy Discrimination Act) and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The Commission based its decision on the grounds that an employee health plan excluded the cost of prescription contraceptive drugs – available only to women – yet covered services for men, such as surgical sterilization and Viagra.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, enacted by Congress in 1978, requires that expenses related to pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions be treated the same as expenses related to other medical conditions.

Both the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 1998 recommended that all health insurance policies providing prescription benefits should no longer exempt contraceptive prescriptions.

At least 13 states, Maryland, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Vermont — have enacted contraceptive equity laws.

What YOU Can Do:

SB 15 has yet to be scheduled for a hearing.

Write a letter, send a fax or e-mail, or call committee members of the first committee of referral (Senate State Affairs Committee) indicating your support for the bill and asking for a hearing on Senate Bill 15, the Prescription Fairness Act. A draft letter is included below.

Write a letter, e-mail, call or fax Representative Lisa Murkowski (R), asking her to introduce this same bill in the House.

Contact your legislator and tell them that you support SB 15, the Prescription Fairness Act.

For More Information on SB 15 contact:

Senator Johnny Ellis staff person Diana Rhoades: (907)465-2906,

[Diana\\_Rhoades@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Diana_Rhoades@legis.state.ak.us).

Juneau Pro-Choice Coalition, [www.juneauchoice.com](http://www.juneauchoice.com).

Sample Letter

(Date)

Sen. Gene Therriault (or other Legislator)  
Chair, Senate State Affairs Committee  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Sen. Therriault:

I respectfully requests a hearing on Senate Bill 15, the Women's Health Equity Act.

I agree with both the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists that all health insurance policies providing prescription benefits should no longer exempt contraceptive prescriptions. Almost 50 percent of all pregnancies are unplanned,

and almost half of those end in abortion. Affordable access to contraceptive coverage is a medically necessary immunization against unwanted pregnancies.

Requiring contraceptive coverage is not new – 10 states already require such coverage.

Thank you for considering our request for a hearing on Senate Bill 15.

Sincerely

(Name, address)

Contact Information:

Senator Gene Therriault, Chair: State Capitol, Room 121, Juneau, AK 99801;  
[Senator\\_Gene\\_Therriault@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Gene_Therriault@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-4797; fax (907) 465-3884.

Senator Bettye Davis: State Capitol, Room 504, Juneau, AK 99801-1182;  
[Senator\\_Bettye\\_Davis@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Bettye_Davis@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-3822; fax (907) 465-3756.

Senator Rick Halford: State Capitol, Room 111, Juneau, AK 99801-1182;  
[Senator\\_Rick\\_Halford@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Rick_Halford@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-4958; fax (907) 465-4928.

Senator Drue Pearce: State Capitol, Room 119, Juneau, AK 99801-1182;  
[Senator\\_Drue\\_Pearce@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Drue_Pearce@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-4993; fax (907) 465-3872.

Senator Randy Phillips: State Capitol, Room 103, Juneau, AK 99801-1182;  
[Senator\\_Randy\\_Phillips@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Randy_Phillips@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-4949; fax (907) 465-4979.

Representative Lisa Murkowski: State Capitol, Room 406, Juneau, AK 99801-1182;  
[Representative\\_Lisa\\_Murkowski@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Representative_Lisa_Murkowski@legis.state.ak.us); phone (907) 465-3783; fax (907) 465-2293.

### **Anti-Abortion Bills Introduced in House and Senate**

SB 91 introduced by Senator Ward would require informed consent before an abortion may be performed, except in cases of medical emergency.

The bill received three committee referrals (HESS, JUD, FIN). Similar legislation was introduced in the House by Representative Coghill. HB 112 also received three committee referrals (HESS, JUD,FIN)

### **Governor Introduces Legislation to Help Victims**

As a result of the Governor's Victims' Roundtable in Anchorage Governor Knowles introduced legislation to shift the burden of collecting offender restitution payments from victims to the Department of Law.

Under the new legislation, victims will no longer have to pursue restitution payments by themselves.

Knowles' bill creates a collection service in the Department of Law to track all court-ordered restitution, collect it, and pass it on to the victims. Any victim who does not wish for the department to collect restitution payments on their behalf can opt out of the program.

Knowles is also re-introducing legislation called the "Victim Protection Bill" which includes several provisions that unanimously passed the House last year. This legislation is designed to further protect victims by:

- \* Allowing a mitigated presumptive sentence for speedy no contest or guilty pleas;
- \* Simplifying procedures for victims to recover stolen property;
- \* Establishing a crime for violating protective injunctions in child in need of aid cases;
- \* Extending current disallowance of civil compromise in some domestic violence cases to all domestic violence cases;
- \* Simplifying the process for stalking victims to get protection orders;
- \* Establishing that a protective order violation could cause at least a contempt of court charge and fine; and
- \* Requiring officials working with custody disputes be trained in domestic violence law.

### **Senator Taylor Introduces SB 94 to Increase Education Funding**

Senator Taylor introduced legislation on Thursday that he says would improve the current foundation funding formula for public schools. SB 94 would make a number of changes to the foundation funding formula.

These changes would add over \$70 million in increased funds to the state's education budget, however there would only be a \$27.6 million increase in spending if all the changes are implemented.

### **BPW Plans Legislative Fly-In**

The Business and Professional Women (BPW) Legislative Fly-In is planned for March 29-31 2001. They urge all women and children groups use the 2001 Alaska Airlines constituent fares and join them for the event.

### **UPCOMING COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*  
Feb 20 Tuesday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106  
HB 41 CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT/SOC SEC. # TELECONFERENCED  
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

HOUSE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE \*  
Feb 21 Wednesday 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120  
HB 32 SEX CRIME AND PORNOGRAPHY FORFEITURES TELECONFERENCED  
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

HOUSE HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*  
Feb 21 Wednesday 4:00 PM CAPITOL 124

SENATE EDUCATION & EARLY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE \*  
Feb 22 Thursday 8:00 AM Terry Miller 104  
Continuation of Child Care Issues

HOUSE HEALTH, EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE \*  
Feb 22 Thursday 3:00 PM CAPITOL 106  
Overview: Child Advocacy TELECONFERENCED

Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

SENATE FINANCE STANDING COMMITTEE \*  
Feb 23 Friday 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532  
SB 72 TAKE A CHILD HUNTING SEASON  
SB 65 PAY EQUITY FOR STATE EMPLOYEES  
Bills Previously Heard/Scheduled

CHILDREN'S CAUCUS  
Feb 23 Friday 12:00 PM FAHRENKAMP 203  
Children's Advocacy Center  
Meeting will begin at noon or following joint session