

Alaska State Legislature



Senator Hollis French

Sponsor Statement

SB 160 - Affordable Health Insurance for All Alaskans

The time has come for us to begin addressing the health care crisis in Alaska. Increasing costs have made it difficult for businesses and individuals to acquire the health services they need. This crisis is only getting worse; family health insurance premiums have risen 4.6 times faster than the median earnings of Alaskans over the past 6 years. As costs continue to increase, it is likely that additional hard working Alaskans will go uninsured. Employers who choose to provide employee health plans will watch their costs go up, making it difficult to run a competitive business in the state. No longer can we wait for the federal government to take action on this important issue.

Many other states have joined the universal health care debate, but this bill is uniquely Alaskan. This bill puts people in control of their own health, giving them the tools they need to make smart investments. Vouchers, funded by a variety of stakeholders, make the prospect of acquiring health coverage realistic to all Alaskans. By guaranteeing that everyone has coverage, insurance premiums will go down. This bill ensures that everyone can purchase an affordable health plan that they select to fulfill their medical needs.

This bill establishes a framework mandating and ensuring affordable health coverage for all Alaskans. A board of 13 stakeholders will oversee the plan, making certain that residents are able to choose and purchase coverage that provides adequate care. The bill also provides:

A framework for personal choice: This bill facilitates a relationship between health insurance providers and individuals, and doesn't assume that a one size fits all solution will meet the health care needs of all Alaskans.

A unique voucher system: By pooling money from all stakeholders, a sliding scale voucher system will ensure that every Alaskan can take personal responsibility for acquiring health insurance coverage. The system will also make it easy for multiple entities to contribute towards a health plan for an individual.

A health care clearinghouse: The clearinghouse will disseminate information about quality health care products, assisting Alaskans who are utilizing vouchers under the Alaska health care plan.

The Alaska health care fund: This fund will receive contributions from individuals, businesses and government to ensure that all interested parties contribute to the health of Alaskans.

Satisfied with your current coverage? This bill will not affect employer based health plans that provide quality health care coverage. In addition, the bill may reduce cost increases for those who currently pay for coverage. A hospital cannot turn down anyone in need of emergency care, and when someone cannot pay their medical costs, those who can pay are forced to subsidize the cost of the uninsured. A recent study estimated that Alaska health insurance premiums are 13.6% higher than they would be if everyone had health coverage (Families USA report). Through ensuring equitable financing of the health care system, SB 160 will reduce the burden on individuals and businesses currently buying coverage.

This bill isn't really about reforming the health care system; it is about ensuring the health of residents across the state. I urge you to consider supporting this bill as we work to improve the quality of life for all Alaskans.