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Governor vetoes contraceptives insurance bill

Haley Lehman
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Haley Lehman/News-Miner

Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy signed three bills into laws at Mushers Hall on Thursday, Sept. 5, 2024.

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Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed a contraceptive insurance bill Wednesday that would have required insurance companies to cover up to a year's supply of birth control at a time.

Alaskans can receive up to 90 days of a prescription at a time under current statute.

House Bill 17, sponsored by Fairbanks Democrat Ashley Carrick, would have required health care companies to cover prescription contraceptives and dispense a year's worth of birth control at a time. Religious employers who oppose covering contraception would have been allowed to opt out.

The Affordable Care Act has required health providers to cover preventative services since 2011, with exceptions for religious employers and religious nonprofits.

Jeff Turner, the governor's communications director, said by email Wednesday, "Contraceptives are widely available, and compelling insurance companies to provide mandatory coverage for a year is bad policy."

The bill received bipartisan support in the Alaska Legislature, passing the Alaska House of Representatives 29-11 in March and the Alaska Senate 16-3 in May.

Rep. Julie Coulomble (R-Anchorage) said in March that she is pro-life and supported the bill because it would give women autonomy to prevent pregnancies.

"It's very practical," she said. "If you're concerned about costs, there are more costs to women with unplanned pregnancies and more abortions for women that find themselves in a spot that they can't have the baby."

Carrick said that she is deeply disappointed about the veto.

“This is not partisan issue, this is not a woman’s issue, it’s an issue that Alaskans care about,” she said.

Carrick said that she hears from hundreds of women across the state who want autonomy and freedom to pick up a prescription that their doctor has already provided. The veto means that the status quo will continue, where women can only pick up one to three months of a contraceptive prescription at a time, she said.

Carrick said that she attempted to discuss the bill and other issues with the governor and his team at least half a dozen times, but those requests were denied or ignored.

“This is pro life legislation at its core,” Carrick said. “This legislation would reduce unintended pregnancies and therefore whenever we see a decrease in unintended pregnancies we see a corresponding drop in abortion rates.”

The governor has advocated for pro-life policies during his time in office.

While addressing outmigration during his state of the state speech in January, the governor said “encouraging pro-life policies that lead to more people having families and kids shouldn’t be controversial.”

Rose O’Hara-Jolley, Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates Alaska state director, said “Vetoing HB 17 is a blatant failure of leadership and an insult to the public health of people in Alaska. Governor Dunleavy has chosen to keep barriers in place that make it difficult for all folks to access essential medication.”

Covering one to three months of birth control at a time creates barriers to access, “particularly for those living in rural areas with limited pharmacy access, individuals working in remote locations for extended periods, and those in abusive relationships where monthly pharmacy visits are challenging or dangerous,” O’Hara-Jolley said.

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MORE INFORMATION

Governor signs four bills into law in Fairbanks

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