

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## **Legislature Passes Senate Bill 159**

*AirCare Membership Program to Continue in Southeast*

(Juneau) – Senate Bill 159, a bill that will allow Airlift Northwest to continue offering the AirCare membership program for medevac services, passed the House of Representatives today by a unanimous vote. The bill had previously passed the Senate unanimously on February 28<sup>th</sup> and now goes to the Governor’s office to be signed into law.

Since January 2009, Airlift Northwest, the provider of lifesaving air medical transport services, has offered the popular AirCare membership program to residents of Southeast Alaska. Over 3,000 Southeast residents are enrolled in the program which covers the cost of any out-of-pocket expenses related to Airlift Northwest’s medevac services. Air medical transportation is expensive and insurance may not cover all the costs. The AirCare program directly helps fund Airlift Northwest so they can transport critically ill or injured patients to hospitals with levels of care not locally available.

Since its inception, the AirCare program was offered to Alaskans under a regulatory exemption it received from the Alaska Division of Insurance. However, after an organizational restructuring, the Division of Insurance deemed the program no longer exempt and ordered Airlift Northwest to cease enrolling new members. Airlift Northwest was told they could honor their existing memberships but were not allowed to renew expired memberships or accept new members. Senate Bill 159 will exempt air ambulance services from the state’s insurance code, thereby allowing Airlift Northwest to continue offering the AirCare program to Alaskans.

Senator Bert Stedman, R-Sitka, the sponsor of Senate Bill 159, expressed his appreciation for all the support the bill received from his colleagues in the House and Senate. “I’m very pleased that the legislature saw fit to ensure this important lifesaving program will be allowed to continue serving the residents of Southeast. I’m also very grateful for the hard work Representative Muñoz has put into this bill and for her advocacy in the House of Representatives.”

Representative Muñoz, R-Juneau, the sponsor of the companion bill (House Bill 300) said, ““Like other Southeast legislators, I heard from a lot of constituents – many of whom are retirees – who worried about losing Airlift Northwest’s AirCare membership plan. SB 159 will allow them to continue being members of this program and give them a sense of peace.”

For more information, contact Senator Stedman at 907-465-3873 or Representative Muñoz at 907-465-3744.