

House approves Health Aide bill

House bill 215 on Community Health Aides passed the House earlier this month, which Representative Adelheid Herrmann said is a great victory for rural health care. The bill goes on to the Senate, and must be signed by the Governor, before it goes into law.

"I am very encouraged that the House chose to pass this bill and was able to recognize the necessity of approving the funds for the bill in this time of declining revenues," said Herrmann, the bill's sponsor.

"The health care needs of rural Alaskans have been overlooked too long and it is high time that the state responded to these needs," said Herrmann.

Community Health Aides are para-professionals who provide primary health care services to over 171 rural communities throughout the state. In areas where there is no doctor or other

health care professional, the Community Health Aides are the link between the community and the health care back-up system. They are the all-purpose health care provider and do everything from putting in stitches and helping deliver babies to handling emergency situations and fighting the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis A and B.

Due to a lack of funds and standardization in the program, many Community Health Aides are not certified or adequately supervised. House Bill 215 would provide the needed funds for training, tuition, and supervision of the state's Community Health Aides. Additionally, the bill sets forth a funding formula to ensure that all regions of the state get an equitable share of state funds made available for this program.

On the floor of the House on Wednesday, April 3rd, Herrmann successfully argued the

cost-effectiveness of the Community Health Aide program, and emphasized that these funds benefit the state as a whole, by helping in the treatment and prevention of serious communicable diseases.

"I know that at this time when legislators and state officials are trying to make substantial cuts to the operating budget, that I and

other supporters of this bill may have to be prepared for a long hard fight. However, you can be assured that I will continue to work toward passing House Bill 215 this year," said Representative Herrmann.

Both the Aleutian/Pribilof Island Association health aide program and the Bristol Bay Area health aide program would

receive substantial increases in their budget if this bill passed. House Bill 215 is now referred to the Senate, and the Senate Health Education and Social Services Committee is expected to be the first committee of referral.

Herrmann will be forwarding to the Senate the letters of support she continues to receive for the Community Health Aide bill.