

Assistance to health aide program signed

ANCHORAGE--A bill providing for state financial assistance for the community health aide program was signed into law by Governor Bill Sheffield in Anchorage today.

According to Sheffield, HB 215, sponsored by Representative Adelheid Herrmann, "establishes an equitable system of distributing state money to a program providing desperately needed medical services in rural areas."

The community health aide program, which is unique to Alaska, was originally created by the United States Indian Health Service nearly 20 years ago, and until 1982, was supported solely from federal funds.

Since that time, selected regional health corporations have received designated state grants from the legislature.

The new legislation provides for state aid in the form of grants or contracts to local as well as

regional health organizations, specifically for training and supervision of health aides. State funding is intended only as a supplement to federal funds.

"With lack of doctors and nurses in small communities across the state, most rural residents rely on the highly trained health aide for their medical needs. It's important that the state do all it can to ensure the continuation of this vital program," Sheffield said.