

NEWS RELEASE

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Key Coalition: Shoring Up the Foundation for Disability Funding

The Key Campaign is a statewide effort, through the Key Coalition, to advocate for disabilities and community disability services. For the past 21 years, the campaign has been amazingly successful in obtaining increased funding and securing critical services such as the TEFRA option; in reinstating funding for adult dental services; in closing the state institution for disabilities; and, most recently, in the promise and in the implementation of a quarterly Waiver Draw that will systematically eradicate the statewide waitlist for community supports.

Unfortunately, each year there are new or ongoing issues that need to be addressed through the Key Coalition. In 2009, families and service providers watch with alarm and critical concern, as community programs and waiver rates are frozen for yet another year. Community programs have seen such a devastating rate freeze for a current total of five out of the last six consecutive years. Cost of living escalates, year after year—fuel, heating, transportation costs, workers' compensation, liability and health insurance costs—while wages and salaries tragically fall far below competitive rates in rural and urban regions of Alaska. As costs increase, community programs and families have felt the devastating effects of such a diabolical moratorium evidenced in low service delivery, inability to recruit and retain essential staff and in the closure of specific programs.

A unified priority for all the beneficiary boards under the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority is effectively addressing how the Department of Health and Social Services currently sets rates for all services offered by providers throughout the state. This system (or lack of a system) is currently arbitrary and inconsistent from one provider to another.

The Coalition is advocating for a process that would govern rates in statute for community services. Doing so would provide for fair and consistent rate setting, while giving all providers equal access to rate increases on an annual basis, just as hospitals and nursing homes now receive.

Other key issues that will be addressed at the Key Campaign are:

- Enhancement of early intervention/infant learning programs.
- Continuation of waitlist reduction.
- Formation of a crisis response team for developmental disabilities.
- Continued funding for preventative dental care for adults who experience a developmental disability.

Anyone who is concerned about the rights, dignity and dreams of individuals who experience disabilities is encouraged to join in the efforts of the Key Coalition by submitting a public opinion message (POM) to your legislature and participating in the Key Campaign rally in their community.

The Key Campaign will be held in Juneau February 24-25, 2009, with similar rallies across the state taking place on Wednesday, February 25. The Anchorage rally will begin at 11:30 a.m. downtown at Town Square between 5th and 6th Avenues and the Mat-Su Valley will be hosting a rally at the Legislative Information Offices at 11:00 a.m.

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