Yukon-Kuskokwim
HEALTH CORPORATION

Akiak
Akiachak
Alakanuk
Andreafsky
Aniak
Anvik
Atmautluak
Bethel
Bill Moore's Slough
Chefornak
Chevak
Chuathbaluk
Chuloonawick
Crooked Creek
Eek
Emmonak
Georgetown
Grayling
Hamilton
Holy Cross
Hooper Bay
Kasigluk
Kipnuk
Kongiganak
Kotlik
Kwethluk
Kwigillingok
Lime Village
Lower Kalskag
Marshall
Mekoryuk
Mountain Village
Napaimute
Napakiak
Napaskiak
Newtok
Nightmute
Nunam Iqua
Nunapitchuk
Ohogomiut
Oscarville
Paimute
Pilot Station
Pitka's Point
Quinhagak
Red Devil
Russian Mission
Scammon Bay
Shageluk
Sleetmute
St. Mary's
Stony River
Toksook Bay
Tuluksak
Tuntutuliak
Tununak
Umkumiut
Upper Kalskag

August 23, 2024

Governor Michael J. Dunleavy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL & US MAIL

RE: Equal Access to REAL ID Cards for Rural Alaskans

The Honorable Governor Dunleavy:

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) is a tribal health organization which provides healthcare services to approximately 30,000 people living in 50 remote, largely Alaska Native villages in roadless southwest Alaska. I request the State of Alaska's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to travel to the communities in our region and other rural areas across our State so that villagers have an opportunity to obtain REAL ID-compliant state-issued licenses or ID cards (REAL ID) by its deadline of May 7, 2025.

This is necessary because many villagers do not have reasonable access or any access whatsoever to DMV services for REAL ID's. The Yukon-Kuskokwim region is not connected to the road system, and the only DMV office in our region – a region larger than the State of Washington– is located in Bethel. The primary mode of transportation from our 50 villages to Bethel or Anchorage is with commercial air travel.

However, air travel to Bethel or Anchorage for the purpose of obtaining a REAL ID is unduly burdensome and very expensive. One round trip airfare from Kotlik, at the edge of our region, to Bethel is $730. Many of our People live a traditional subsistence lifestyle mixed with a cash economy. Jobs are scarce and unemployment is extremely high. For many, the cost of airfare from one of our communities to Bethel to obtain a REAL ID is unaffordable and therefore, the opportunity to receive a REAL ID is totally unavailable. While it appears that tribal ID's will continue to be accepted by the TSA after its deadline, the percentage of adults with tribal ID's acceptable to the TSA is unknown and likely very inconsistent by village.

YKHC is the largest rural tribal health organization (THO) in the nation and is one of almost 30 THO's in the State. *YKHC alone sends over 300 patients every single week through a TSA airport to Anchorage for necessary medical care.*

As a result, without the State ensuring there is a reasonable opportunity, many members of our communities will be unable to obtain a REAL ID by its deadline,

which will create a barrier to travel on commercial aircraft at TSA airports to obtain necessary medical care. This has the potential to create a healthcare crisis in rural Alaska because air travel is essential for our customers to access a higher level of care in Anchorage.

I made this same request by letter dated October 18, 2019. At the time, the DMV's "REAL ID FAQ" stated that it was "working with community partners to increase access to DMV services, including REAL ID cards." Since then, it is our understanding the DMV does not have any community partners that have led to a significantly increased issuance of REAL ID's in YKHC villages and that the DMV has not visited any of the 50 villages in our region to issue REAL ID's. Now the deadline is once again, less than one-year away.

The State of Alaska has an obligation to provide reasonable and equal access to DMV services to afford opportunities to all Alaskans to obtain a REAL ID so all Alaskans can travel intrastate to obtain access to a higher level of necessary medical care, including those who reside off the road system. Unequal access to DMV services for obtaining a REAL ID will create a disparate impact on the Alaska Native people in our region and across our State, and it will likely result in negative medical outcomes and higher costs to the state's Medicaid program. Therefore, I again, respectfully request the State of Alaska's DMV to travel to our communities and other rural villages throughout Alaska to enable Alaskans to obtain REAL ID-compliant state-issued licenses or ID cards by May 7, 2025.

In the alternative, to avoid a potential health care crisis, what is the State of Alaska's plan to ensure all eligible Alaskans, regardless of where we live, have reasonable access to obtain REAL ID licenses or ID cards for travel through TSA airports to Anchorage where a higher level of necessary medical care is available?

Sincerely,

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM HEALTH CORP.

Dan Winkelman
President & CEO

cc: Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson
Representative CJ McCormick
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Neal Foster
ANHB
ADN
KYUK