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Potential Government Shutdown Effects on Department of Health and Social Services

Shutdown could limit access to marriage licenses, stop grant payments to providers

June 8, 2017 ANCHORAGE – In anticipation of a potential government shutdown, the Department of Health and Social Services is warning Alaskans of services that might not be available next month. Because the Legislature has not passed an operating budget for fiscal year 2018, services not directly linked to life, health and safety needs could be delayed, interrupted or shut down beginning July 1, 2017. This includes the issuance of birth and marriage certificates, grant payments to health care providers, and health facility licensing for small businesses.

“While I am hopeful that the legislature will pass a fully-funded budget before July 1, we are working closely with Department of Law and the Office of Management and Budget to determine what a government shutdown would look like for our department,” said DHSS Commissioner Valerie Davidson. “Shutting down the government could mean delayed certificates for Alaskans who are getting married this summer. We could also see delayed processing of birth certificates, which is often a minimum requirement for applying for other state and federal services. DHSS touches the lives of so many Alaskans. A shutdown would cause unnecessary burden to individuals and private businesses alike.”

Services that could be shut down, delayed or interrupted if the legislature fails to pass a fully funded budget before July 1 include, but are not limited to:

- marriage and birth certificates issued by the Bureau of Vital Statistics;
- investigation of all but the most serious reports of abuse in state licensed residential and healthcare facilities;
- assuring follow-up of abnormal newborn health screenings;
- support for the state’s opioid crisis response;
- services provided through private organizations and businesses that receive DHSS grant funding;
- residential and health facility licensing; and
- analyses of federal healthcare legislation and federal budget proposal impacts in Alaska

This year's preparations for a government shutdown are different than in 2015, when the legislature had passed a partially funded budget. This year, money has not been appropriated for any government services. As a government shutdown in Alaska is unprecedented, Department of Law is examining what money could be spent to continue vital state services if the legislature has not fulfilled its constitutional obligation to pass a budget.

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