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EXHIBIT 6
DATE 2-5-2009
HB HB 331

February 5, 2009

The Honorable Elsie Arntzen, Chairwoman
House Local Government Committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

RE: HB 331 – Revising Laws Related to Licensed Establishments for Health Purposes

Dear Chairwoman Arntzen and Members of the House Local Government Committee:

On behalf of RiverStone Health, Yellowstone County's public health organization, I urge your favorable consideration of HB 331 – Revising Laws Related to Licensed Establishments for Health Purposes. This bill allows for license fees for food service establishments, trailer courts and public accommodations to be established by rule instead of by statute.

So that we can adequately protect the health of the public and fully meet the needs of licensed establishment operators, a licensed establishment program must go beyond routine inspections. Current licensing fees do not cover all that is required for program compliance. Education, follow-up inspection, community complaint investigation, illness outbreak investigation, and enforcement are all vital components in monitoring, diagnosing and investigating public health concerns.

In 2008, the cost to run the licensed establishment program in Yellowstone County was nearly \$460,000 of which only 15%, or just over \$73,000, was provided through license fees; leaving local taxpayers picking up \$385,000 for this state mandated program. Last year, 5 FTEs provided 1580 inspections and conducted 53 training classes.

Last year was a good year with few disease outbreaks thus education, inspection, and enforcement activities could be characterized as "normal". 2006 was not a normal year. Many of you may remember the community-wide norovirus outbreak. During this outbreak, nearly 1200 people reported becoming ill and RiverStone Health had completed food histories on each person. The investigation, enforcement and education activities focused the efforts of 19 staff people for 79 days at a direct cost of over \$75,000; \$2,000 over the amount of revenue collected from all license fees in Yellowstone County.

Were we only to rely on the revenue collected from licensing fees, our 2006 norovirus outbreak would have been our sole focus of that year. As this situation clearly demonstrates, local tax dollars significantly supplement the costs of performing the duties associated with the state mandated licensed establishment program. These are local dollars which could otherwise be spent to provide additional needed community-wide public health services such as immunizations and health promotion and disease prevention activities.

We are not asking that licensing fees cover the costs associated with the disease outbreaks like the one previously mentioned, just that the fees be established by rule thus enabling licensed establishment programs to set fees that are equitable and based on the activities needed to take a comprehensive approach in protecting the health of our community.

I urge your support of HB 331 which enables local health departments to better meet the public health needs of our communities. I look forward to working with you on this and other important public health measures. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at barbara.sch@riverstonehealth.org or 651-6420.

Sincerely,



Barbara Schreeman, Director
Communication & Advocacy

Cc: Representatives Arlene Becker, Robyn Driscoll, Wanda Grinde, Tom Berry, Penny Morgan