PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY
Exhibit No. 4
Date 2-11-2009
Bill No. SB 350

February 11, 2009

The Honorable Roy Brown, Chairman
Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee
Montana State Senate
PO Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

Dear Chairman Brown and Members of the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the below signed members of the Montana Infectious Disease (ID) Network in support of SB 350, Routine HIV Screening. The ID Network is a strategic statewide collaborative and its membership includes the ID physicians currently practicing in Montana. The ID Network's vision is to serve as an advising regional, clinical, and readiness partner in the area of infectious and communicable disease. In that capacity the ID Network has been actively involved in the development of SB 350 and has provided input throughout the process.

SB 350 follows the new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for HIV testing that state that opt out HIV screening and HIV diagnostic testing should be part of routine clinical care in all healthcare settings. This routine HIV testing is essential for a variety of reasons:

- 25% of people living in the U.S. with HIV do not know they are infected and these 25% are responsible for 50% of the new diagnoses.
- HIV is a serious health problem that can be reliably diagnosed prior to symptom development and patients are more likely to be tested if it is suggested by a clinician.
- Early entry into care increases the likelihood of a longer healthier life; unfortunately up to an estimated 38% of people living with HIV in Montana are not diagnosed until they are in the late stages of the disease.
- Individuals who know their positive HIV status are more likely to engage in risk reduction efforts.
- Appropriate treatment during pregnancy can reduce the perinatal transmission rate to less than two percent.

We fully support SB 350 and believe that this would help prevent the continued spread of HIV infection in Montana by identifying those individuals with unknown status. In addition, earlier HIV diagnosis would help ensure improved outcomes for identified HIV patients.

Thank you for your consideration of this important measure.

Sincerely,

George Risi, MD – St Patrick Hospital, Missoula
Camilla Saberhagen, MD– Billings Clinic, Billings
David Graham, MD– Billings Clinic, Billings
Donald Skillman, MD – St. Peters Hospital, Helena
Ray Geyer, MD – Great Falls Clinic, Great Falls
Fred Kahn, MD – St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings