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The Honorable Mike Hawker
State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

RE: HB 263 - Extend Senior Benefits Payment Program

Dear Representative Hawker,

On behalf of the over 90,000 members of AARP Alaska, we offer support without reservation for HB 263, which extends the very important Senior Benefits Program until 2021. Without passage of HB 263, the Senior Benefits Program will end in June of this year.

We know the Governor and the Legislature will never have enough money to do all that they would like to do to help older Alaskans remain here after retirement. Recognizing that public monies will always be limited, AARP's public policy position is that state funds should always go to those most in need, whether financial need or health needs. The Senior Benefits program now has a proven track record of providing support for older people whose income (defined by the eligibility criteria) is simply not adequate to pay for their total housing, food, heat, and health care costs. In fact, the older people most likely to benefit from an extension include:

• Older women: Many of the people who are supported with Senior Benefits payments are women who were lower income at 64 and, finally at 65, they are eligible for some assistance from the state. Very often these women did have assets and savings but used them to pay for the health care costs of a now deceased spouse.

• Alaskans who simply were not paid that much when they were working. Many lower paid workers had more than one job, but with Alaska's higher cost of living, simply were not able to accumulate much and are more likely to be receiving minimal Social Security benefits and have no private pension coverage.

• Rural Alaskans, especially those who live subsistence lifestyles. These individuals are least likely to have cash income. If they receive Social Security, their benefits are often very low. The loss of the Senior Benefits Program would hurt many older Alaskans living in our remote villages.

• The oldest of our citizens. Many more people are now living into their 80's and 90's, and as they age they are more likely to find themselves on tighter budgets. No pension or retirement system adequately compensates for inflation, particularly in health care costs. Our oldest citizens are the ones most likely to spend increasing amounts of their retirement budgets on health and other bare necessities.

We are grateful to you, Rep. Hawker, for your sponsorship of HB 263, and the respect for Alaska's seniors that you demonstrate. We offer our best wishes for extension of this important program. Please contact me if you have any questions about AARP's support.

Respectfully,

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