

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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February 9, 2011

Representative Bob Herron
Alaska Capitol, Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for HB 78, Incentives for Certain Medical Providers

Dear Representative Herron:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) supports for HB 78, a bill to establish a loan repayment program to build Alaska's health care workforce by increasing the recruitment and retention of targeted health care professionals in urban and rural, underserved communities. This bill is authored by you and co-sponsored by Representative Edgmon.

Alaska, as with the rest of the nation, is experiencing a shortage of health care workers as fewer students are entering the health care profession and many of those already working in health care are preparing for retirement. Alaska is one of five states that does not offer a state-sponsored loan repayment program for health care professions. As a result, our hospitals, clinics, and communities lose potential health care workers to other states that incentivize their workforce with loan repayment programs.

Access to quality health care is a priority for all Alaskans and a critical need for people age 65 years and older. Older Alaskans benefit from regular health care services which enhance their overall health and decrease the need for more expensive, intensive treatment and emergency visits.

Alaska continues to lead all states with the fastest growing senior population currently comprising about 12 percent of our state's population and is projected to increase by five to six percent each year until 2020. The graying of Alaska's population is creating substantial shifts for workforce, particularly in the health care and long-term support service sectors, as demand increases and providers are reaching retirement age. If older Alaskans are unable to find a health care provider, they may be forced to leave the state in search of access to health care professionals. As a result, Alaska could suffer from a loss of retirees, who contribute more than \$1.7 billion to the state's economy in addition to their significant volunteer service, caregiving activities, and community leadership.

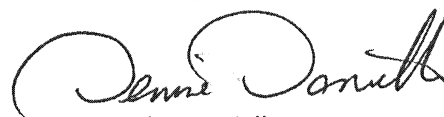
ACoA supports HB 78 and believes that the proposed legislation will help to build a qualified health care workforce who will be available to meet the health care needs of older Alaskans. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director, by phone (465-4879) or email (denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you have questions or require additional information about our position. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director