

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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April 9, 2011

Senator Lesil McGuire
Alaska Capitol, Room 125
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for SB 62, Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Senator McGuire:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our strong support of SB 62, a bill to establish a mechanism to enhance funding for the Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC) by allowing the Legislature to appropriate up to 25% of filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System in addition to annual appropriations approved from the General Fund. This bill is sponsored by you and co-sponsored by Senators French, Paskvan, Wielechowski, and Menard.

ALSC addresses the civil legal needs of low-income Alaskans by providing subsidized and no-cost legal representation. Currently, there are approximately 88,000 Alaskans who live below 125% of the poverty level who are eligible for these services, including Alaskan seniors. Over the years, state funding has declined while the number of low-income people in need of legal services has increased. This legislation is designed to help increase funding levels for ALSC appropriate for serving a growing number of Alaskans needing these services.

Legal assistance for seniors is provided statewide by ALSC and assures that seniors, especially those at greatest social and economic risk, have access to the civil justice system. According to ALSC, more than 600 older Alaskans receive legal services annually through this statewide nonprofit organization that does not include community outreach activities to seniors. Examples of ALSC assistance provided to seniors include help with consumer and family law such as establishing Miller Trusts, guardianships, conservatorships, and wills; assistance with housing issues including resolving renter-landlord disputes, foreclosures, and reverse mortgages; among other forms of legal assistance. Alaska Legal Services employs approximately twenty attorneys statewide. Due to funding limitations, they are only able to accept one in five cases of all people who call for help.

The ACoA supports SB 62 to improve access to civil legal representation for Alaska's most needy population. Access to legal information, advice, and assistance helps older Alaskans preserve financial and personal independence, maintain control of their finance and health care decisions, maintain appropriate family relationships, and protect personal assets and well-being. Thank you for sponsoring this important legislation. 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.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Joe Paskvan
Senator Linda Menard
Senator Hollis French
Senator Bill Wielechowski