

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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January 15, 2011

Representative Mike Hawker
Alaska State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for HB 16

Dear Representative Hawker:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our enthusiastic support of HB 16, a bill sponsored by you to reauthorize the Senior Benefits program which is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2011. Because this program provides a critical financial safety net for Alaska seniors, the Alaska Commission on Aging supports the extension of the sunset date to 2015 or beyond.

The Senior Benefits program, originally initiated by you and enacted by the Legislature in 2007, has been an invaluable program for modest-income seniors who are on small fixed incomes to assist them to live with dignity and independence in their home communities. Alaskans age 65 and over with incomes up to 175% of poverty are eligible for a calibrated monthly cash benefit based on income through the Senior Benefits program. Although the monthly payments are not large amounts, they can make a significant difference in whether or not an older Alaskan is able to afford food, rent, fuel, medication, and other necessities. Many low-income seniors do not have cash reserves that allow for emergencies or the increasing cost of living.

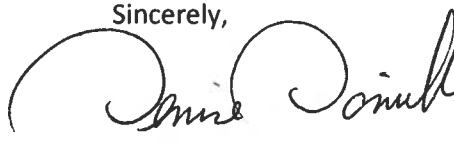
In fiscal year 2010, the average monthly enrollment in the Senior Benefits Program was 10,009. Among the Department of Health and Social Services' nine regions, there is wide variation in the percentage of seniors age 65 and over who receive Senior Benefits. Statewide, less than one in five seniors (19.1%) participates in the Senior Benefits program. Region 1 (the Bethel/Wade Hampton area), long recognized as a very low income region of the state, has over 50 percent of seniors participate in the program. The Aleutian Islands, Region VIII, also has a high rate of participation – more than twice as high as the state's average rate.

The Alaska Commission on Aging strongly recommends that the 2011 Legislature vote to extend the sunset date for the Senior Benefits Program, enabling the program to continue to support those seniors most vulnerable to economic stresses. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you require additional information. Thank you so much for your support of this important program for older Alaskans.

Sincerely,


Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,


Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director