

January 24, 2011

The Honorable Mike Hawker
Member of the House of Representatives
Alaska Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: HB 16 (Hawker) – Support

Dear Representative Hawker:

The Alaska Food Coalition is pleased to express our support for HB 16 which will extend the Senior Benefits Program for another four years. At least 1/3 of the Alaska Food Coalition membership serves the senior population. Our members identify hunger, or food insecurity, as a growing problem among the senior population in Alaska.

The Hunger in America 2010 study found 42% of adult pantry and soup kitchen clients in Alaska were 50 and older. Of those pantry visitors 65 and older, 57.8% told us they experienced low or very low food security; they worry about or don't know if they will have enough food. The study also found, of all pantry clients in Alaska:

- 43% had to choose between buying food and paying for utilities
- 45% had to choose between buying food and paying for rent or mortgage
- 35% had to choose between buying food and medicine

Among households with 1 senior member age 65 or older, 21.8% participate in a home delivered meal program. Agencies who deliver home meals have reported a 20% increase in requests for services. The Salvation Army Older Alaskans Program in Anchorage estimates there are twice as many seniors in Anchorage in need of their services. The Yakutat Senior Center serves an average of 42 meals a day; double what they served the previous year. According to data from the Alaska Department of Public Assistance, food stamp recipients age 60 and over increased by 22% in 2009. The need is clear; our low-income seniors need help paying for basic needs.

We want all Alaskans to be hunger free, food secure. There is no question the Senior Benefits Program has helped Alaskan seniors put food on their tables, and will continue to do so with continued funding. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and wish to express our sincere thanks to you for helping Alaska Seniors live full and productive lives.

We were also thankful to Representatives Millet, Lynn, Gara and Tuck for signing up to co-sponsor HB16.

Please do not hesitate to contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager if you have any questions, 907-222-3103 afc@foodbankofalaska.org

Thank you for all that you do for Alaska.

Sincerely,

Heather Harris
Alaska Food Coalition President

CC: Representative Charisse Millet
Representative Les Gara

Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Chris Tuck