

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

March 1, 2011

Representative Cathy Muñoz
Alaska State Capitol, Room 403
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for HCR 3

Dear Representative Muñoz:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our support of HCR 3, a resolution sponsored by you to help raise awareness about the growing problem of elder abuse and to promote safety and protection of older Alaskans.

Elder abuse is a devastating and unrecognized problem that oftentimes goes unreported and can have life-threatening consequences. According to a report from the National Institute of Justice (March 2009), approximately 11% of people age 60 years and older suffer some form of abuse every year. Other studies have shown that elderly victims of abuse, exploitation and neglect have twice the risk of dying within a year. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that only one out of six elder abuse incidents (excluding the cases of self-neglect) are reported to authorities. The majority of cases go unreported as elders/seniors are often reluctant to report the abuse, particularly if the abusers are family members, for fear of shaming the family or losing that person's care. Sometimes well-meaning family and other unpaid caregivers suffer from "caregiver burnout" that can lead to mistreatment. According to Dr. Lisa Gibbs, University of California, "Elder abuse is where child abuse was 30 years ago," referring to society's lack of awareness of the mistreatment of vulnerable adults.

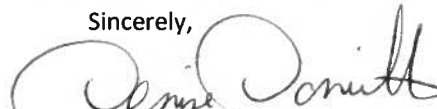
Alaska continues to lead all states in the rate of growth of people age 60 and older; they number 85,100, according to 2009 estimates from the Alaska Department of Labor and are projected to triple in size over the next 25 years due to the aging of the baby boomer population. Moreover, Alaska has the fastest growing population of the "oldest old" (those 85 years and older) many of whom are frail, have high health care needs, and are most at risk for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias in addition to other complex behavioral needs. Older adults with dementia are particularly vulnerable to abuse as well as persons who live in isolation. As the number of assisted living homes has increased significantly over the last three years for seniors and people with developmental disabilities, so have complaints from elderly residents and their family caregivers to the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman concerning quality of care in assisted living settings. Adult Protective Services, an agency under the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, reports a 169% increase in their reports of harm. While the increase in reporting may be partly attributed to growing social awareness, the increase in the senior population, particularly among the "oldest old" (persons age 85 years and older), and the current times of economic insecurity may also contribute to mounting threats of neglect, fraud, and abuse directed toward the most vulnerable.

Please accept our sincere appreciation for your efforts to improve protection and safety for Alaska's most vulnerable citizens. We look forward to working with you to raise public awareness about the prevalence of elder abuse in Alaska and to develop strategies to protect Alaska's vulnerable elderly citizens from harm. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, by phone (465-4879) or email (denise.daniello@alaska.gov) for questions or help in promoting this effort. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,


Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

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