

Carol Dejka
513 N. Franklins St
Juneau, AK 99801

January 31, 2014
The Honorable Mike Hawker
Member of the House of Representatives
Alaska Capital, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

RE: HB 263 (Hawker) - Support

Dear Representative Hawker:

I want to express my support for HB 263 which will extend the Senior Benefits Program for another four years.

I have worked with elderly and disabled clients as a part time Chore, Personal Care Assistant and Respite worker in Juneau, AK since 2007. I have attended the Senior Lunch Program at Mt View Senior Center over the years with many of these clients. I see their bare cupboards and empty refrigerators at the end of every month, and I hear them tell me with relief in their voices that they have found a ride to the food bank again this month. When a senior has trouble keeping food on the table, you know that other expenses such as medications, visits to the dentist, visits to the eye doctor and new glasses are not getting taken care of either. The Senior Benefits Program seems like the least we can do for those who have carried the work load for the world we see today.

Thanks you for sponsoring this bill,
Sincerely, Carol Dejka

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Dejka".



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February 3, 2014

The Honorable Mike Hawker
State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

RE: HB 263 - Extend Senior Benefits Payment Program

Dear Representative Hawker,

On behalf of the over 90,000 members of AARP Alaska, we offer support without reservation for HB 263, which extends the very important Senior Benefits Program until 2021. Without passage of HB 263, the Senior Benefits Program will end in June of this year.

We know the Governor and the Legislature will never have enough money to do all that they would like to do to help older Alaskans remain here after retirement. Recognizing that public monies will always be limited, AARP's public policy position is that state funds should always go to those most in need, whether financial need or health needs. The Senior Benefits program now has a proven track record of providing support for older people whose income (defined by the eligibility criteria) is simply not adequate to pay for their total housing, food, heat, and health care costs. In fact, the older people most likely to benefit from an extension include:

- Older women: Many of the people who are supported with Senior Benefits payments are women who were lower income at 64 and, finally at 65, they are eligible for some assistance from the state. Very often these women did have assets and savings but used them to pay for the health care costs of a now deceased spouse.
- Alaskans who simply were not paid that much when they were working. Many lower paid workers had more than one job, but with Alaska's higher cost of living, simply were not able to accumulate much and are more likely to be receiving minimal Social Security benefits and have no private pension coverage.
- Rural Alaskans, especially those who live subsistence lifestyles. These individuals are least likely to have cash income. If they receive Social Security, their benefits are often very low. The loss of the Senior Benefits Program would hurt many older Alaskans living in our remote villages.
- The oldest of our citizens. Many more people are now living into their 80's and 90's, and as they age they are more likely to find themselves on tighter budgets. No pension or retirement system adequately compensates for inflation, particularly in health care costs. Our oldest citizens are the ones most likely to spend increasing amounts of their retirement budgets on health and other bare necessities.

We are grateful to you, Rep. Hawker, for your sponsorship of HB 263, and the respect for Alaska's seniors that you demonstrate. We offer our best wishes for extension of this important program. Please contact me if you have any questions about AARP's support.

Respectfully,

Ken Helander
Advocacy Director
762-3314
khelander@aarp.org



IT IS IN THE SHELTER
OF EACH OTHER THAT
THE PEOPLE LIVE.

Irish Proverb

February 3, 2014
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:

Community Connections is pleased to express our support for HB 263 which will extend the Senior Benefits Program for another four years. Community Connections serves the senior population on Prince of Wales, Metlakatla and Ketchikan. Our referral services identify hunger, or food insecurity, as a growing problem among the senior population in these areas.

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. 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 are also thankful to Representatives Millet, Lynn, Gara and Tuck for signing up to co-sponsor HB 263.

Thank you for all that you do for Alaska.

Sincerely,

Patricia Gardner
SDS Director
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January 31, 2014

The Honorable Mike Hawker
Member of the House of Representatives
Alaska Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
RE: HB 263 (Hawker) – Support

Dear Representative Hawker:

The Alaska Food Coalition is pleased to express our support for HB 263, which will extend the Senior Benefits Program. 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.

Many agencies who deliver home meals have reported a substantial increase in requests for services. For example, the Juneau Senior Center has seen a 20% increase over last year, and also reports that many seniors they work with indicate that they are running out of food before the end of the month. Similarly, the Valdez Food Bank has more than doubled the number of weekly deliveries to seniors. The need is clear; our low-income seniors need help paying for basic needs.

There is no question the Senior Benefits Program has helped Alaskan seniors put food on their tables, and will continue to do so with the requested funding. Paul Watson, an Alaska Food Coalition employee who conducts outreach for the Senior Benefits Program explains: "It's one of the most appreciated benefits I've ever worked with." We appreciate your leadership on this issue and wish to express our sincere thanks to you for helping Alaskan seniors live full and productive lives.

Sincerely,

Cara Durr
Manager, Alaska Food Coalition