



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