



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 25, 2013

The Honorable Neal Foster, Co-Chair
The Honorable Gabrielle LeDoux, Co-Chair
House Military & Veterans' Affairs
Alaska Capitol, Rooms 434 & 416
Juneau, AK 99801-11B2

Subject: Support for HB 59, Missing Vulnerable Adult Prompt Response & Notification Plan

Dear Representative Foster, Representative LeDoux, and House Military & Veterans' Affairs Members:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our support for HB 59, a bill sponsored by Representative Gruenberg, to establish a vulnerable adult prompt response and notification plan that will involve the cooperation of the Department of Public Safety with the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. Based on our understanding, the proposed vulnerable adult response program would be modeled after the successful *Amber Alert* used to find missing children and use media outlets and existing emergency notification infrastructure. Although this legislation addresses the problems of all vulnerable missing adults, the ACoA will focus on benefits we perceive for vulnerable older Alaskans from this legislation.

Wandering outside unattended and unprotected is a significant personal safety risk for persons with Alzheimer's disease. According to the Alzheimer's Association (2011), nearly 60% of people with Alzheimer's disease wander at some point during the course of their disease. If not found within a 24-hour period, up to one-half of those wanderings may result in personal injury or death. For older Alaskans wandering outside during the winter or in areas with moose or bear nearby, getting lost has life and death consequences.

As part of our efforts to learn more about the needs of people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ARD) and their caregivers, ACoA conducted seven community forums statewide that were attended by 161 persons, many of whom are unpaid family caregivers. Improving public response services to reduce safety risks for persons with Alzheimer's disease who wander was identified as a high priority concern by the forums' participants.

The ACoA supports HB 59 that authorizes the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs to work in cooperation with the Department of Public Safety and develop a missing vulnerable adult response plan that will improve the safety of vulnerable Alaskans, such as individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. We understand that this program will not present any significant cost to the state and addresses the need for a formal notification system to help locate missing vulnerable adults, such as older Alaskans with ARD, who often become disoriented due to their impaired condition and whose personal safety is at risk. The majority of states have established "silver alerts." An added benefit of this legislation is that it will help to promote more awareness among law enforcement officials regarding the issues of older Alaskans.

Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you require additional information about our position. Thank you for your support of HB 59 and for recognizing the critical need to improve public safety for persons with Alzheimer's disease and other vulnerable adults.

Sincerely,



Paula Pawlowski
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Representative Pete Higgins
Representative Shelley Hughes
Representative Lora Reinbold
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Max Gruenberg, HB 59 Sponsor