



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MICHAEL J. DUNLEAVY

Department of Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

P.O. Box 110693
Juneau, AK 99811-0693
Main: 907.465.3250
Fax: 907.465.1398

April 3, 2019

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
House Community and Regional Affairs
Alaska State Capitol, Room 108
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

Representative Sara Hannan, Co-Chair
House Community and Regional Affairs
Alaska State Capitol, Room 403
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

Subject: HB 60, Letter of Concern

Dear Chair Drummond, Chair Hannan, and House Community and Regional Affairs Members:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA and "the Commission") is concerned about the proposed elimination of the Senior Benefits Payment as requested by HB 60. Since 2007, the *needs-based* Senior Benefits program has provided an invaluable resource for older Alaskans, age 65+, who live on limited fixed incomes to afford basic life necessities – food, housing, heating fuel, prescription medications, and transportation – to maintain good health, safety, and independence. Reauthorized overwhelmingly by the Legislature last year, Senior Benefits provides cash assistance to approximately 11,600 older Alaskans ranging from \$76 to \$250 a month based on three levels of income eligibility with their assigned cash benefits (Division of Public Assistance, December 2018 counts).

The Alaska Commission on Aging, a Governor-appointed board within the Department of Health and Social Services, exists specifically to ensure the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans. The Commission is responsible for planning services for seniors, educating Alaskans about senior issues, and making recommendations directly to elected officials regarding policy and budget items that affect Alaska's seniors.

We believe that Senior Benefits, a critical component of the Senior Safety Net, supports older Alaskans who are the most financially fragile by providing direct cash assistance to eligible seniors who cannot afford to pay for basic necessities, let alone cover emergency needs like a boiler repair during the dead of winter.

Over the years, growth in the number of seniors participating in the Senior Benefits program has been modest. Since 2007 when the program was established, the annual enrollment figures have increased about an average of 1.5% statewide even though the population of people age 65 and older has increased approximately 4.5% annually during the same time period.

The risk of living in poverty increases with age, along with worry about financial security, as older people spend down their assets on health care and living expenses. The Commission fully supports retaining the Senior Benefits Program in statute and therefore does not support passage of HB 60. We believe that the Senior Benefits program is important for low-income elders because not having enough food to eat, a warm place to live, or losing one's home due to economic hardship means losing independence, self-determination,

and inevitably translates into a higher cost to the family and to the state in the need for expensive medical treatment and long-term care.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, at 465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov for further information about our position.

Sincerely,



Gordon Glaser
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Mary Shields
Vice Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Cc: Representative Matt Claman, Member
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Member
Representative Steve Thompson, Member
Representative Sharon Jackson, Member
Representative Josh Revak, Member

From: [Robert Woodling](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Subject: Senior Assistance
Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 2:00:09 PM

My name is Lee Woodling and wish they don't get rid of this program! Don't mind sacrificing some of my dividend but really need senior assistance and adult public assistance to survive! I love Alaska been here since 1991 and don't want to go back to lower 48! Thanks for your time. Robert L Woodling

From: [Alaska Tom](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Subject: Please Oppose HB 60 (Repeal of the Senior Benefits Program)
Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 4:23:15 PM

I am not one of the seniors who would be affected by the repeal of HB 60, the Senior Benefits Program.

I was fortunate enough to have gainful employment during my working career and have sufficient monthly income to live a comfortable life. This is not true, however, of many senior citizens who have called Alaska their home, have contributed to our economy during their residency and, even with the Senior Benefits Program, live a very meager life.

Those who support repeal of this program try to convince the rest of us that receipt of the PFD should be enough assistance to those who would lose income if HB 60 is passed. Just imagine taking the PFD (even if it is \$3,000 which we all know it will not be) and dividing by 12 months (\$250) and trying to determine whether you will pay for rent, utilities or food. The highest monthly payment under the Senior Benefits Program is \$250 per month; the least amount is \$76 per month. It is difficult to imagine living on such an income in Alaska, especially when the average senior beneficiary is 75 years old, likely has chronic health problems and must regard every expense as a choice between a necessity and another necessity.

Passage of HB 60 will financially harm the most vulnerable among us. That is not the Alaska I have grown to love and respect.

Please oppose the passage of HB 60.

Thomas U Rachal Jr
Alaska Resident since 1970

and inevitably translates into a higher cost to the family and to the state in the need for expensive medical treatment and long-term care.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, at 465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov for further information about our position.

Sincerely,



Gordon Glaser
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Mary Shields
Vice Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Cc: Representative Matt Claman, Member
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Member
Representative Steve Thompson, Member
Representative Sharon Jackson, Member
Representative Josh Revak, Member

From: [Rep. Harriet Drummond](#)
To: [Sarrah Khilif](#)
Subject: FW: Senior Benefits
Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 9:25:55 AM

From: Andi Flanagan <anditaggart@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 9:24 AM
To: Rep. Harriet Drummond <Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov>
Subject: Senior Benefits

I am a Senior receiving the Benefit. I am living on \$1100.00 a month and getting \$19.00 in food stamps. Could you live on this? I live substandard and always fearful of eviction. I would have to live in my car. The Senior Benefit is what sustains me. It is how I eat! It helps with transportation costs. I have come to fully depend on it for groceries. Unable to hunt or fish anymore, I eat meat only once or twice a week. I subsist on Ramen. Fresh vegetables are a once a month treat. Beans and Rice, a staple. I am begging you to not repeal. I am in your hands. Please help a lifelong born Alaskan. My parents and grandparents were here building Alaska long before Statehood. I am a member of the Pioneers of Alaska and many of them are in the same sinking boat.

Please, Harriet, remember me when you vote. My life is in your hands.

From: [Pat Ivey](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Cc: [Rep. Adam Wool](#); [Sen. Click Bishop](#); [Sen. John Coghill](#); [Sen. Scott Kawasaki](#); [Rep. Bart LeBon](#); [Rep. Grier Hopkins](#); rep.sara.hannon@akleg.gov; [Rep. Harriet Drummond](#)
Subject: HB60 oppose
Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2019 8:47:26 AM

Testimony for House CRA

April 2, 2019

Subject: HB 60

Testifier: Patricia M. Ivey, age 78, 44 year resident of Fairbanks, retired from University of Alaska after 37.5 years of service,
supervoter of no party affiliation, email iveypat@gmail.com, cell 907-590-8800

Testimony

Please do NOT eliminate the senior benefits program. There are approximately 20,000 seniors 60 and above in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Approximately 5 percent are below poverty level. The senior benefits program payments literally determine whether or not these seniors can buy groceries or provide other critical services. Along with proposed Medicaid cuts many seniors will be forced to decide between required medications, starving to death or freezing.

Please do NOT cut this vital program.

Thank you for your time.

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Erika](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Subject: Comments on Senior Benefits Program / HB 60
Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 5:22:36 PM

Dear Members of the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee,

I'm writing to express opposition to repealing the Senior Benefits Program. This program provides modest funds to the lowest income elders within our state and is critical to their ability to maintain independent living. We should not be looking to cut the budget by eliminating programs that support our most vulnerable residents. To do so would be, in my mind, the greatest disrespect to those who have spent their lives building Alaska and its communities.

Sincerely,
Erika Wolter
Chugiak, AK 99567

Sent with [ProtonMail](#) Secure Email.

AARP: 'This administration either doesn't understand the Senior Benefits Program, or it doesn't care'

ALASKA HOUSE MAJORITY · THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2019

The House Finance Committee recently held a series of community meetings on Alaska's budget. The effort helped prompt an outpouring of feedback from Alaskans on the proposals contained in Governor Mike Dunleavy's budget, which would fundamentally change life for many Alaskans. In the coming days, [Alaska House Majority](#) will share some of the nearly 1,800 public comments to help give an idea what's really at stake. The Majority does not necessarily endorse all of the proposed policy proposals suggested by Alaskans in these comments.

Submitted by Ken Helander, Advocacy Director, [AARP Alaska](#)

Of great concern to AARP Alaska and to the 11,283 older Alaskan beneficiaries are the discussions about the budget proposal to zero out the Senior Benefits Program, as well as the administration's submission of both a House and a Senate bill to repeal the Senior Benefits Program altogether. Such action suggests that this administration either doesn't understand the Senior Benefits Program, or it doesn't care. And while other major cuts in the budget have loud and well-organized constituencies to make the arguments, poor older Alaskans have few to speak for them.

For this reason, AARP Alaska strongly opposes HB 60, a bill to repeal the program, as well as urges full funding of the program. The Senior Benefits Program was created in 2007 as something of a reiteration of the old Longevity Bonus Program that was completely phased out under Gov. Murkowski. The old program paid a monthly cash benefit to Alaskans 65 and older regardless of their need for it. Senior Benefits came into being with the recognition that though not all older Alaskans needed this money, there are some who desperately do. These are often older women who may have lost their economic security caring for a dependent spouse or child. Or it might have been a low wage worker who never had a chance to save and whose Social Security amount is very small. It also includes many who lived and worked by subsistence, not building a cash retirement savings or substantial Social Security.

In any case, these are older Alaskans who are economically poor. How poor? Those who qualify for the largest Senior Benefit amount (\$250/mo) can have no more (often less) than

\$949/month income. The middle benefit amount is \$175/mo for persons who have incomes below the 100% Federal Poverty Level (\$1265/mo), and for the current lowest benefit (\$76/mo) the income limit is 175% FPL at no more than \$2214/mo. It is difficult to imagine living on such an income in Alaska, especially when the average Senior Beneficiary is 75 years old, likely has chronic health problems and must regard every expense as a choice between a necessity and a necessity.

When older Alaskans who qualify lose this income supplement from the Senior Benefits program, it will be gone and irreplaceable. They are not going to go out and get a job or ask for a raise. They are not going to ask for help from mom and dad. They will simply have permanently lost a significant amount of their monthly income, and therefore their financial security. Unquestionably the loss of this income will increase the risk of losing their independence and hasten their move to a much costlier track of dependent care.

The Senior Benefits Program is not a bricks and mortar program for the state. In fact, it functions in much the same way as the Permanent Fund Dividend, though on a smaller scale. The monthly allowance from the state goes directly to the senior beneficiary who then spends it on necessary expenditures in this state. They certainly are not going to Best Buy or taking a trip to Hawaii. It is a modest financial stimulus to Alaska's economy and could rightly be regarded as a state investment rather than an expense.

The argument we hear from the Administration and some legislators is that the loss of the Senior Benefit income is offset by getting a larger Permanent Fund Dividend. How is this so? Why should an older Alaskan, long past working age, be asked to give up a significant portion of their needed income in order to get a dividend when most other Alaskans are not? It is not fair. Moreover, to offset with a PFD, the Senior Beneficiary would have to divide the PFD amount by 12, and dole it out carefully each month to make ends meet. Does anyone do this, or have to?

There is no sense of security in a PFD that comes once a year that could make up for the loss of the monthly allowance of the Senior Benefit Program. The PFD will likely vary from year to year, and does not provide a sense of long term security. Being old and poor in Alaska is not a circumstance for more insecurity. Rather, as Alaskans of all ages (knowing we'll all be older Alaskans one day) we must advocate for the preservation of this very important lifeline for some of our most vulnerable neighbors and family members. The Senior Benefits Program was reauthorized in the last legislative session through bills sponsored by then Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks) and then Rep. Scott Kawasaki (D-Fairbanks) with a unanimous vote in the Senate and only one no vote (Eastman R-Wasilla) in the House.

Let us hope this legislature recognizes the same value of the Senior Benefits Program for our Alaskan elders. SB 58 and HB 60 (to repeal the Senior Benefits Program altogether) must be

defeated, and the budget must include adequate funding to treat senior beneficiaries the same as other Alaskans with regard to their PFD.

AARP Alaska is proud to speak on behalf of the 11,000 older Alaskans whose lives are made more secure and independent by the Senior Benefits Program. Failure to preserve the Senior Benefits Program for low income older Alaskans will mean we are all the poorer for it.

From: [Laib Allensworth](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Subject: FW: Subject: Senior Benefits being taken
Date: Friday, April 5, 2019 10:58:31 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

From: Ann Lee <anniemlee53@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 6:05 PM
To: Laib Allensworth <Laib.Allensworth@akleg.gov>
Subject: Re: Subject: Senior Benefits being taken

Hello:

Please submit this to testimony about HB 60 for Alaska Senior Benefits. I want the legislatures to know that this money is not spent on frills. How can you be on low income and any monies that come from Senior Benefits be for frills. I live on \$750.00 Social Security and Senior Benefits of \$250.00 per month making my income \$1,000. Can any of you folks live on that amount. If you take it away I will end up being destitute. **PLEASE PLEASE CONSIDER THE LOW INCOME SENIORS AS THEIR ARE AT LEAST 1,000 RECIPIENTS IN THE KENAI PENINSULA AREA THAT ARE IN DIRE NEED OF BENEFITS TO MAKE IT HERE IN ALASKA. I AM A 53 YEAR RESIDENT OF ALASKA AND DON'T WANT TO MOVE ANYWHERE ELSE JUST TO SURVIVE.** It would be harder for me to live back in my home town of Juneau with the rent right now.

Thank you,

Ann Lee

On Tuesday, April 2, 2019 5:34 PM, Laib Allensworth <Laib.Allensworth@akleg.gov> wrote:

Hello Ms. Lee,

Public Testimony will take place on April 4th (Thursday) starting at 8:30am. There are a number of ways to give your testimony.

If you're in Juneau you can come to the Capitol Room 124 or call 586-9085

If you're in Anchorage you can call 563-9085

and if you're anywhere else you can call toll free at 844 586 9085

Once they've been picked up, ask to be connected to the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee hearing on House Bill 60.

If you'd like to submit written testimony as well you can email it to us using these emails or by sending it to hcra@akleg.gov

The best suggestion is to call early, though you will likely have to wait for testimony to opened and they generally take testimony in the order the calls are received.

If you have any other questions please let us know. You can respond to this email or call us at 907-465-3875 anytime between 8am and 5pm.

Best Regards,

Laib Allensworth

Laib Allensworth
Office of Representative Drummond
907-465-3875
State Capitol, Room 108
Juneau, AK 99801
Laib.Allensworth@akleg.gov



From: Ann Lee <anniemlee53@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 2, 2019 2:27 PM
To: Rep. Harriet Drummond <Rep.Harriet.Drummond@akleg.gov>
Cc: Rep. Sara Hannan <Rep.Sara.Hannan@akleg.gov>
Subject: Subject: Senior Benefits being taken

Hello Rep. Drummond/Rep. Hannan:

I would like to give testimony on keeping Senior Benefits please advise how I can do this.

Thank You,

Ann Marie Lee

From: [Marna Sanford](#)
To: [Rep. Harriet Drummond](#); [Rep. Sara Hannan](#)
Subject: Senior Benefits HB60
Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019 8:44:52 AM

I apologize for not getting this to you before Committee today, but I hope it goes without saying that Tanana Chiefs Conference is OPPOSED to the elimination of the Senior Benefits Program, or the reduction of the benefit to our elders. While the monthly stipend may seem small to a program administrator, our seniors often use this money for food and medicine. It is essential. It is not a perk. Please preserve this program.

m

Marna L. Sanford
Government Relations
122 1st Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99701
907.452.8251 x3317



Colleen E. Swan

State of Alaska
House of Representatives

Date: April 3, 2019

Re: Testimony towards -
HB60 An Act Repealing the Senior Benefits Payment and Providing for an Effective Date

Many elders today, having lived a traditional life for most of their years, had not had an opportunity to live a Western European (WE) lifestyle to earn income or to gain a full WE educational level and store Social Security benefits on which they would have been able to draw on. So, they depend highly on what other income they can get from a culture that requires cash on which to pay their bills and buy food.

All elders should be respected for their contribution to our society and should all have an opportunity to retire comfortably. Here in Alaska, a very rich state for many years, that does not happen. They are not going away and many today are reaching the peak in their lives, still not having had an opportunity to contribute enough to the Social Security benefit program due to lack of work to retire comfortably. So they depend on what other source of help they can get.

I am wholly opposed to terminating any State funded program that takes more from them that they cannot afford to lose. This is not sound economics when you consider how much more poverty this can cause among the most vulnerable of populations, our elders. I am opposed to the bill that is proposed that will cause more devastation but I would support a stronger government that is smart enough and strong enough to take more from the oil wealth of our state and increase the elders' benefit programs.

I have attached a partial description of who is being affected by this proposed legislation entitled, "*Inupiat* Elder: The Embodiment of *Inupiat* Identity," a piece I wrote for them.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

Colleen E. Swan, Kivalina Resident

Attachment: "*Inupiat* Elder: The Embodiment of *Inupiat* Identity"

Cc: Senator Donny Olson
US Senator Lisa Murkowski

From: [Brooke Heppinstall](#)
To: [Rep. Harriet Drummond](#); [Rep. Sara Hannan](#)
Subject: House Bill 60 to Repeal Senior Benefits Program.: testimony
Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019 12:44:06 PM
Importance: High

Please support the Senior Benefits Program which serves around 10,000 vulnerable Alaskans. This program is means tested, it is essential monies for those who cannot replace that meager income with work or other means. This program's help may mean a senior can get transportation to the doctor, put food on the table, keep a 'lifeline' phone, and more. The average age of these recipients is 75, many are women who have run through their assets and are now single. Often these are Alaskans who were working in the low pay economy without benefits and have no pension income other than small Social Security benefits. I have met many who are looking at less than \$500/month from SSN and some of that will be reduced by Medicare monthly deductions. In the bush, there are few opportunities for those elders to accumulate any savings. Our elders are now living well into their ninth decade. With high health care costs many of them will spend their pension monies down to cover those costs.

I am glad my own mother was able to be a recipient of the old longevity bonus which brought her living expenses up from \$750/month. Alaska has a long history of caring for our own. These elders have given us their strength and wisdom. Let's remember to support the most vulnerable of them when they need it the most.

Thank you.

Brooke G Heppinstall Kroenung
2963 N Kroenung Rd.
Palmer, AK 99645
907-746-3606

Madame Chair, Committee members,

My name is Faith Myers, I

volunteer as a mental health advocate.
I do not support HB 60.

The state's Senior Benefits
Program should not be discontinued.

Senior Benefits are means tested.

The majority of the recipients are
listed at or below the poverty

level. Some have disabilities.

I myself have a disability and receive Senior Benefits.

I can assert, There is a connection between
being able to pay bills and mental
health. As long as the Senior

Benefits Program is means tested—
it should be continued. I do not
support the passage of HB 60

Thank you

Faith Myers

3240 Penland Pkwy, Sp. 35 Anchorage AK

99508

907-227-5827

907-248-3342

From: jimbailey@gci.net
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Cc: [Jim Bailey](#); execdiropag@gci.net
Subject: HB60
Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019 9:01:03 PM

I was at the Anchorage Senior Center during your hearing today. My name was phoned in from our group but I was not included. I have lived in Anchorage for 45 years with a long education career. i am a registered independent. I am a board member on the municipal senior advisory committee as well as a board member at the Anchorage Senior Activity Center. As Executive Director of OPAG, which publishes the Senior Voice, I was asked to express the support for not doing HB 60.

Our organization feels strongly that the richest state in the union should not cut the support of our neediest and vulnerable seniors who are currently receiving senior benefits from the state. Our our organization has 1500 members and our newspaper puts out 14,000 copies month. Thank You.

James Bailey

April 4, 2019

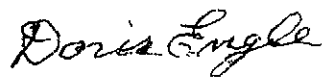
Dear House Community and Regional Affairs Committee,

I have been living in Alaska since 1966.

Picking on the seniors is no way to balance the budget.

Cutting all ferry service will also lose lots of jobs in the state as well as causing a hardship for small communities that are not on the road system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doris Engle".

Doris Engle

Homer, Alaska

From: [Kris Reisinger](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Cc: ["Linda Hendrickson"](#)
Subject: BILL 60
Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019 7:14:12 AM

Dear ladies and gentlemen:

I am the administrator of a local assisted living home. The cash benefits paid to seniors with low to moderate income needs to be maintained as a vital program to seniors. Working with seniors daily, I can tell you that this money is sometimes life-saving as folks use it to supplement their medication budget. I do advocate for a tighter application processes, but cutting the program completely and abruptly will put seniors in danger. Please reconsider cutting the program completely.

Kindly,

Kris Reisinger Orcutt
Assisted Living Administrator

Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center
Phone: 907-688-2661
Fax: 907-688-1320
www.chugiak.org/housing/alp
www.facebook.com/chugiakeagleriverseniorcenter

It's never too late to be what you might have been. George Eliot

The information contained in this transmission may contain privileged and confidential information, including patient information protected by federal and state privacy laws. It is intended only for the use of the person(s) named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any review, dissemination, distribution, or duplication of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender by reply email and destroy all copies of the original message.

From: [Kris Reisinger](#)
To: [House Community and Regional Affairs](#)
Cc: ["Linda Hendrickson"](#)
Subject: BILL 60
Date: Thursday, April 4, 2019 7:14:12 AM

Dear ladies and gentlemen:

I am the administrator of a local assisted living home. The cash benefits paid to seniors with low to moderate income needs to be maintained as a vital program to seniors. Working with seniors daily, I can tell you that this money is sometimes life-saving as folks use it to supplement their medication budget. I do advocate for a tighter application processes, but cutting the program completely and abruptly will put seniors in danger. Please reconsider cutting the program completely.

Kindly,

Kris Reisinger Orcutt
Assisted Living Administrator

Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center
Phone: 907-688-2661
Fax: 907-688-1320
www.chugiak.org/housing/alp
www.facebook.com/chugiakeagleriverseniorcenter

It's never too late to be what you might have been. George Eliot

The information contained in this transmission may contain privileged and confidential information, including patient information protected by federal and state privacy laws. It is intended only for the use of the person(s) named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any review, dissemination, distribution, or duplication of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender by reply email and destroy all copies of the original message.

PETERSBURG LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION OFFICE

Email: lio.petersburg@akleg.gov
907-772-3741/ phone/ 907-772-3779/fax

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

YOUR FULL NAME:

REPRESENTING (ORGANIZATION OR SELF):

BILL #: **Subject**

COMMITTEE NAME: **HEARING DATE:**

My wife and I were self-employed commercial fishermen and had to retire early due to health problems. Our sole monthly income is my Social Security benefit and these Senior Benefit payments. Senior Benefits is about 19% of our monthly income. Losing Senior Benefits would devastate us. As it is now, there are no extras. No travel, nothing extra.

I'm a veteran, I worked all my life, and paid into Social Security and income tax. Don't take this away from those who really need it.