

# STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE  
Alaska Mental Health  
Trust Authority

MIKE DUNLEAVY, GOVERNOR

## Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman

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To: Senate Sate Affairs Committee

The Alaska Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman program is pleased to offer support for *Senate Bill (SB) 62*– “An Act relating to the board of parole; and providing for an effective data”. The mission of the LTC Ombudsman program is to provide resident-centered advocacy designed to protect the rights, health, safety, and welfare of Alaskans living in long-term care settings. However, we advocate to improve the quality of life and care for all seniors.

There’s more than 400 people over the age of 60 who are incarcerated in our prisons on any given day. Aging seniors are a rapidly growing population in prison, yet the most challenging to care for in a prison setting. In order to find ways to provide older incarcerated people with adequate healthcare, end of life care and dignity as they face serious or medical illnesses, we need to explore how to meet the unique needs of this population with sensitivity and compassion. Officials are hard pressed to provide the medical care and activities of daily living to the incarcerated aging population. Consider an elder who has heart failure, dementia, cancer or other debilitating or end of life medical conditions. These seniors who would most likely benefit from living in a long-term care facility. The incarcerated senior population generally pose the lowest risk of repeating crimes for any age group. The recidivism rate for people 55 and older is around 2% and it’s almost zero for people 65 and older.

While we have geriatric and medical parole in Alaska, few people who apply for medical or geriatric parole, are not granted these paroles. Incarcerated seniors would benefit from having weighted consideration to their age and health or medical conditions in parole decisions. Having a licensed physician on the board could provide insight into the aging process and offer considerations for individuals with complex medical needs. The OLTCO supports the additional criteria for membership to create a board that more closely reflects the incarcerated in Alaska and requires that one member of the board have substance misuse rehabilitation support experience and one member be a licensed physician, psychiatrist or psychologist who may better understand the needs of the incarcerated aging population.

The Alaska Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman urges the Alaska State Legislature to support *SB 62* that expands the number of seats on the Alaska Board of Parole and establishes criteria for membership to better reflect the prison population and who may better understand the needs of the incarcerated aging population.

Thank you for your work on this bill.

Sincerely,

***Stephanie Wheeler***

Stephanie Wheeler, PhD

State of Alaska, Long-Term Ombudsman Program