

Support Behavior Health Programs

Doniece Gott

From: Jennifer Marschke <jmarschke@sailinc.org>
Sent: Monday, March 26, 2018 11:37 AM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: Operating and Mental Health Budgets

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Jennifer Marschke, IL Advocate at Southeast AK Independent Living in Haines, AK.

The implementation of the proposed budget increases in operating and mental health is crucial to the health of our seniors and those that experience a mental health diagnosis.

Most seniors survive in Alaska on a fixed budget of social security or retirement, and savings from their lifetime. A great deal of older Alaskans also care for younger family members. The senior benefit enables the elderly in our community to buy enough food to last the full month, pay a bill of heat, or supplement the cost of raising grandchildren or family members. A great deal of seniors that receive this benefit would not survive without it.

It would also be helpful to fund additional employees at the guardianship and public assistance offices. These employees work very hard every day to ensure that the elderly, abused, or low income have a form of support and the work load cannot be supported by the number of individuals employed.

I hope that you will consider these bills and approve them for the future of our elderly and low income Alaskans.

Thank you.

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THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 27, 2018

The Honorable Senator Anna MacKinnon
Senate Finance Committee Co-Chair
Alaska State Capitol, Room 516
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1182

The Honorable Senator Lyman Hoffman
House Finance Committee Co-Chair
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1182

Subject: Alaska Commission on Aging Operating Budget Recommendations, HB 285 and HB 286

Dear Senator MacKinnon and Senator Hoffman:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA or the "Commission") appreciates your support of continued funding in the operating budget for the Community Based Grant Funded Services for Seniors, the Alaskans Living Independently (ALI) waiver, and Personal Care Services in the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services component as well as elder protection services provided by Adult Protective Services (Senior and Disabilities Services) and the Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman (Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority). These services, that comprise the *Senior Safety Net*, promote the health and safety of Alaska's older people, provide support for their family caregivers, and allow seniors to remain living safely in their homes and communities for as long as possible at the lowest cost. In FY2017, grant and Medicaid-funded community based services provided support for approximately 31,300 older Alaskans.

The Commission respectfully encourages your support of the following budget recommendations as proposed in the Operating and Mental Health budgets, HB 286 and HB 285, and for appropriate funding for the Alaska Senior Benefits Payment Program pending passage of CSHB 236. We believe these programs, administered by the divisions with the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the Department of Administration (DOA), are cost effective as they protect the health and safety of all Alaskans, including our older citizens, leverage additional federal funding, and control increases in state spending over time.

Alaska Senior Benefit Program Payments to Recipients, DHSS, Division of Public Assistance: Senior Benefits is a critical safety net program for Alaskans age 65+ with limited incomes to remain independent. Senior Benefits makes a *real* difference in whether or not an older person is able to live comfortably and afford food, shelter, heating fuel, prescription medications and other necessities. Senior Benefits helps the oldest of the old, rural elders who live a subsistence lifestyle, older people who live alone, and the growing number of low income grandparents who are raising grandchildren by helping them to make ends meet. Approximately 11,322 seniors utilize this program statewide (Division of Public Assistance, December 2017). This modest assistance, critical to the health and safety of vulnerable older people, helps them to remain independent and ultimately saves money from their needing higher cost care. Alaska has the highest cost of nursing home care in the nation. According to the FY2017 estimates from the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services continuum of care chart, the average annual cost of nursing home care per person is \$164,234. *If this program prevented just 1% of the seniors served by Senior Benefits from*

requiring institutional nursing home care (or 113 seniors), the annual savings would be \$18.6 million (\$164,234 annual cost/person in nursing home X 113 seniors), which is almost the total FY2017 annual budget for Senior Benefits.

Based on the on the annual average caseload growth experienced over the last five years, ACoA recommends sufficient funding for Senior Benefits to allow for at least a 2% annual growth in the Senior Benefits recipient population and the restoration of funding to the greatest degree possible for the highest income/lowest benefit tier from \$76/month to \$125/month.

Medicaid Payments to Recipients, DHSS, Divisions of Senior and Disabilities Services, Public Assistance, and Behavioral Health: Vulnerable seniors and persons with disabilities rely on Medicaid-funded home and community-based services for their health and safety. The Commission supports sufficient funding for these services that were not included in HB 321, the fast-track supplemental bill, to cover the remaining gap for FY2018 so that providers may continue providing services to vulnerable Alaskans.

Hospital-based Behavioral Health Care, DHSS, Division of Behavioral Health: Seniors who suffer from co-occurring conditions of dementia and serious mental illness can demonstrate behaviors that put themselves and others at risk of harm. While the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) serves this vulnerable population, they have reached capacity which, in turn, leads to delays in patient admittance and results in people waiting days or longer in hospital emergency rooms. This funding will support the development of “safe rooms” staffed with licensed mental health professionals to appropriately treat patients in crisis at hospitals. In Juneau, Bartlett Hospital has 10 beds dedicated to serving people with opioid addiction. These beds are full most of the time.

ACoA supports adding \$10.5 million in state funds to secure \$10.5 million in federal Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funds to support hospitals with demonstrated need in Anchorage, Wasilla, Fairbanks, Soldotna, Bethel, and Juneau to better serve Alaskans with complex behavioral health disorders.

Public Guardian Support, DOA, Office of Public Advocacy: Vulnerable older Alaskans and other disabled persons who are found by the court to be incapacitated and in need of a protective order depend on public guardians to help them maintain their benefits, manage personal finances, make medical decisions, and secure appropriate housing. While guardians are often family members, friends, or trusted others, some at-risk vulnerable adults have no one to serve in that role and require the services of a public guardian. Currently, the caseload of 100 cases per public guardian is more than double the recommended national caseload of 40 cases per guardian. This funding, originally proposed in the Governor’s budget and partially funded by HB 321, will be used to hire additional public guardians and guardians ad litem to serve vulnerable Alaskans who have been found incapacitated by the court and in need of a protective order. Public guardians protect vulnerable seniors and other disabled Alaskans from financial exploitation and other forms of abuse, ensure proper medical care, access to appropriate services, and prevent crisis situations from occurring.

Public Assistance Field Services, DHSS, Division of Public Assistance: Financial security is a serious worry for many older Alaskans living on fixed incomes. The risk of poverty increases with advanced age. Older people are more likely to spend increasing amounts of their budget on health and other basic necessities. Many depend on food stamps, public assistance, General Relief, heating assistance, and Senior Benefits. Moreover, a growing number of seniors are raising their grandchildren on a limited income. Submitting an application for public assistance may require waiting months before an application can be processed due to the extensive backlog of public assistance applications and excessive worker caseloads. When a person suffers from hunger, poor housing, or lack of heat in the dead of winter, this wait can feel like an eternity.

ACoA supports the amount of \$2.2 million in the operating budget over three years to hire an additional 41 positions and address the backlog of applications in Public Assistance so that low income Alaskans may receive the assistance they desperately need today.

Information Technology, Telehealth Service System Improvements, DHSS, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS): The Commission supports the Governor's budget request of \$100,000 GF/MH to expand the telehealth pilot project statewide administered by SDS in collaboration with regional health organizations and local clinics. ACoA views this project as a cost effective strategy using technology to provide timely annual reassessments for seniors and persons with disabilities who live in rural, remote communities to determine their eligibility for Medicaid waiver services. This project implements the expansion of telehealth, as identified in SB74 passed by the legislature in 2016, to reform Alaska's health care system by improving access to care and reducing costs. The use of telehealth will allow for increased access to services and significantly reduce travel and staff costs, without the vulnerable person having to leave their home community for the reassessment. Further, Adult Protective Services will have access to the telehealth project for their investigations involving cases in rural, remote communities.

The Alaska Commission on Aging appreciates your thoughtful consideration of these operating budget items that impact services used by vulnerable Alaskans, including seniors and persons with disabilities. Thank you for your consideration and support of CSHB 236, reauthorization of the Senior Benefits program for six years. For further information, please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, at 465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Click Bishop, Vice Chair
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Natasha von Imhof
Senator Donald Olson
Senator Gary Stevens

Doniece Gott

From: Bruce Van Dusen <bvandusen@alaska.net>
Sent: Sunday, April 01, 2018 1:36 PM
To: Senate Finance Committee
Subject: FY19 Budget

To the Honorable Finance Committee,

It is our hope the budget includes funds equal or greater than the FY18 allocation for the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery (CBHTR) grants. These funds allow us to serve a vulnerable group of beneficiaries. With these funds we provide a wide array of services and supports that the beneficiary group could not afford to pay for out of pocket. We ensure members of this population have safe, affordable and quality housing. We administer three successful employment programs, with high rates of persons returning to the workforce. We provide supports for beneficiaries to access education programs. Our services assist other providers of services in Juneau. We lower the number of persons accessing Bartlett ER services for mental health issues. We significantly lowered the instances of law enforcement interventions at Polaris House. In the past 18 months we have called for assistance three times. Persons who use our services are more likely to participate in mental health care, taking medications as prescribed, keeping treatment related appointments, and have support to responsibly use Government support checks; such as, Social Security Income and Adult Public Assistance. Polaris House members are guaranteed a safe place, a place to belong, meaningful work and meaningful relationships. Please continue to support this population as they seek to achieve their full potential.

Sincerely,

Bruce Van Dusen
Executive Director
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