



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of
Health and Social Services**

Senior and Disabilities Services
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special
Education
Patrick J. Reinhart, Executive Director

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Anchorage, Alaska 99503
Main: 907.269.8990
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February 16, 2018

RE: HB106 Letter of Support

To Representative Claman:

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the "Council") fills a variety of federal and state roles, including serving as the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. As the state DD Council, the Council works with Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) and other state agencies to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families receive the services and supports that they need, as well as participate in the planning and design of those services. One of the duties of the state DD Council is providing comments on bills that may have an impact on individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families.

The Council would like to extend its support for HB 106. Your sponsorship of this bill is greatly appreciated as we feel that it will positively impact Alaska's most vulnerable populations, including individuals with disabilities.

For low-income Alaskans with disabilities, legal services are primarily received through non-profit public interest firms. Without these vital legal services, low-income Alaskans with disabilities could be at risk of losing their home, healthcare, access to food, or even the ability to be protected from abuse. Such consequences have an obviously disastrous human impact, truly highlighting the imperative need for quality legal services to be available for all those who are in need of them. Without sufficient funding to allow full access to necessary services, individuals could be subject to unfair treatment and would certainly not be able to fully utilize the justice system. The Council believes that the percentage should be increased from the proposed 5% to 25%.

The Council strongly supports HB 106 and the finances it would provide to enhance the provision of civil legal services to low-income Alaskans, including those who experience a disability. A clear disparity exists between the available funding for legal services for low-income individuals and the number of individuals in need of said services. In the past 30 years the number of Alaskans below the poverty level has increased, while the total appropriations for such services have decreased. HB 106 will be a positive step towards meeting the current need. Thank you for working to ensure that the Alaska justice system is fully accessible to all of the residents of this great state.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maggie Winston".

Maggie Winston, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Art Delaune".

Art Delaune, Legislative Chair



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Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 21, 2018

Representative Matt Claman
Alaska State Capitol, Room
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for CSHB 106, Civil Legal Services Fund

Dear Representative Claman:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our continued support for CSHB 106, a bill sponsored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Gara, Kopp, LeDoux, Edgmon, Kito, Guttenberg, Kawasaki, Parish, Tarr and Josephson to establish a mechanism that funds civil legal services for low-income individuals, veterans, and older Alaskans. While the original legislation allowed the Legislature to appropriate up to 25% of the filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System for the civil legal services fund, the current CSHB 106 allows for a maximum annual appropriation up to 5% of the court filing fees, or \$126,500 based on current estimates. In FY2016, the legislature appropriated \$450,000 to the civil legal services fund, according to information provided by Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC). The Commission on Aging is concerned that the lowered percentage in court filing fees proposed by CSHB 106 may compromise the ability of nonprofit organizations, such as ALSC, to successfully leverage resources to maintain services in urban and rural locations statewide that would result in fewer qualifying Alaskans receiving civil legal aid. Providing these services in rural locations is particularly expensive. A reduced funding level may result in closing rural-based offices limiting access to civil assistance for rural-based veterans, older Alaskans, and other vulnerable people as well as reduced services for eligible persons residing in urban areas.

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), a nonprofit civil legal aid agency that has provided no-cost civil legal assistance to low-income Alaskans for over 50 years, is an example of an organization that would benefit from this legislation. ALSC is the sole statewide agency that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income seniors, veterans, and other eligible Alaskans.

Legal assistance for seniors is provided statewide by ALSC and assures that seniors, especially those at greatest social and economic risk, have access to the civil justice system. Last year, Alaska Legal Services provided direct legal aid to more than 1,500 seniors and 171 caregivers statewide. ALSC helps seniors establish Miller Trusts, power of attorney, advance directives and wills; prevents seniors from losing their housing due to predatory lending practices, illegal foreclosure or eviction, and renter-landlord disputes; and helps seniors obtain and maintain Social Security benefits.

The Commission supports CSHB 106 however asks that the legislature reconsider the reduced appropriation of court filing fees in light of the potential impact on seniors and other low-income Alaskans having equal access to our civil justice system. The provision of legal information, advice, and assistance helps older Alaskans to preserve their financial and personal independence, retain control of their financial and health care decisions, maintain appropriate family relationships, and protect their personal assets and well-being. Please feel free to include the Commission's letter in the bill packet for CSHB 106. Thank you and the bill's co-

sponsors for championing this important legislation to improve access to the civil justice system by seniors, veterans, and other Alaskans having limited means.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Cc: Representative Les Gara
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Sam Kito
Representative David Guttenberg

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Representative Scott Kawasaki
Representative Justin Parish
Representative Geran Tarr
Representative Andy Josephson