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State tells families deceased Alaskans not eligible for PFD

Rule requires residents to live in Alaska for entire year to qualify

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By Mike Nesper | **Peninsula Clarion**

When Kasilof resident Carole Okamoto contacted the Alaska Permanent Fund dividend division with questions concerning the PFD application process on behalf of her late husband, she was asked a series of questions one would expect:

Did the applicant receive the 2008 dividend? Yes.

During 2008 was the applicant gone from Alaska more than 90 days total? No.

Did the applicant die during the period beginning January 1, 2009, and ending at midnight March 31, 2009?

Huh?

Why does this matter? Okamoto wondered.

What she discovered was that because her husband, Bob, died Nov. 8, 2008, he was not eligible to apply for a 2009 PFD check, which is paid to Alaska residents for the 2008 calendar year. But how could this be?

Okamoto's husband was a long-time Alaska resident, he was in state the necessary 180 days and wasn't a convicted felon. He should be entitled to his check, his wife thought.

"It negated his whole life that year," Okamoto said. "It just doesn't make sense. He deserves it."

Okamoto contacted Rep. Mike Chenault's office, looking for assistance and an explanation of the law. Chenault's office put Okamoto in contact with Deborah Bitney, the director of the permanent fund dividend division.

Chenault's office e-mailed Bitney explaining Okamoto's situation and asked if her husband qualified to receive a 2009 PFD check. Bitney responded with one line: "A person who dies during 2008 does not qualify for a 2009 dividend."

In an interview Friday, Bitney said in order to apply for the PFD Bob would have had to have been alive at some point during 2009. She said a person has to be a resident of Alaska the entire year of 2008 to qualify.

"The rule is you have to be a resident of the state the entire qualifying year," she said.

Bitney said if a person dies during the application process then a family member can apply for them on their behalf, but if a person dies during the qualifying year, 2008 in this case, they are not eligible to apply.

Bitney said the PFD division doesn't have the authority to change the laws surrounding the application process and that any changes would have to come from the Legislature.

Okamoto has attempted to call Chenault and Sen. Tom Wagoner but has not received any return calls. With the Legislature now in session, Okamoto wants to see this law changed.

"This is the time to address it," she said. "This is the time to correct it."

"We need to change the rules, this is not right," said Rose Renner, of Kasilof.

Renner's father died Nov. 14, 2008, and like Okamoto, the PFD office told Renner her father did not qualify to apply for the 2009 dividend.

Renner said if someone can live in Alaska for half of the year and Outside for the other six months and still receive a check, then her father, who lived in the state more than 10 months of 2008, should be eligible to receive the PFD.

"I am still going to file his PFD," Renner said. "There are a lot of people facing this same issue. I do not think that these laws are acceptable."

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