

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 110693
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0693
PHONE: (907) 465-3250
FAX: (907) 465-1398

December 8, 2009

SB 238 - See item #5, page 2

Senator Johnny Ellis
716 West 4th Ave. Suite 500
Anchorage, AK 99501-2133

Dear Senator Ellis:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to present to you our FY2011 legislative priorities for the upcoming session. These top issues were identified with input from older Alaskans, family caregivers, providers, and senior advocates statewide. The ACoA is a state agency under the Department of Health and Social Services, established in 1982. Our charge is to plan, educate and advocate on behalf of all older Alaskans (persons aged 60 years and older) through inter-agency collaboration so that Alaska seniors/elders may lead useful and meaningful lives with dignity and independence and have access to quality services when seniors need them to remain safely in their homes and chosen communities for as long as possible.

- 1. Establish a regular and periodic schedule of rate reviews for home- and community-based services** that serve persons who are Medicaid-eligible and meet nursing home level of care. This measure will promote ongoing awareness of the true costs of providing services. SB 32, sponsored by Senator Johnny Ellis, passed the Senate and the House Health and Social Services Committee last session and waits to be scheduled for a hearing in House Finance. ACoA encourages passage of this legislation.
- 2. Eliminate, or alternatively, adjust the cap on adult dental services reimbursed by Medicaid** to provide program benefits that keep pace with higher health care costs due to inflation, and **allow Medicaid patients access to two-years program benefits in a single year** to permit scheduling of treatment around the oral health care needs of the patient. The current law places a statutory \$1,150 limit on dental health care expenditures per eligible client. When the Medicaid Adult Dental program was created in 2005, this amount was sufficient to pay for one half of a set of dentures, either an upper or lower, with the idea that a patient who needed dentures could have both sets if the treatment was scheduled around the turn of the fiscal year. Although health care costs continue to rise, the cap has not been increased in three years. Allowing Medicaid patients access to two years of program benefits in a single year furnishes Alaskans and their dentists the flexibility needed to provide treatment addressing oral health emergencies that can occur at any time.
- 3. Provide increased operating and capital funding to establish an Alaskan Public Transportation Fund for operations of local coordinated transportation systems** which the State can use to leverage additional federal funds to improve accessible, affordable transportation for older Alaskans, persons with disabilities, low-income individuals, youth and others without access to transportation so that Alaskans with special needs may have greater access to employment and community participation opportunities. According to the Governor's Coordinated Transportation Task Force Report (2009), Alaska is one of only three states in the nation that does not provide any specific state funding for public transportation.
- 4. Provide operating funding to enhance the Aging and Disability Resource Centers**, administered under the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, to streamline access to more efficient information and referral services by providing eligibility screening, options counseling, and assessments so that Alaskans can make informed decisions and have access to long-term care services through a "one-stop shop," reducing confusion and program fragmentation.

5. Return to the original wording of AS 47.07.020 (b) (6), the Medicaid statute establishing income eligibility for persons requiring nursing home level of care, referencing 300% of the maximum Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit rate rather than the current frozen dollar amount (\$1,656 a month) to reflect changes in cost of living so that seniors and other Medicaid-eligible persons will not be disqualified for services, including home- and community-based waiver services, due to small increases to their Social Security and other benefits. The amount of \$1,656 is the monthly amount of 300% of SSI in 2003. The 2009 income equivalent is \$2,022 monthly.

We also want to take this opportunity to share with you highlights from the Alaska Elder/Senior Community Forums that we hosted in Kotzebue (August) and Anchorage (December) to increase understanding about the issues that are of most importance to older Alaskans and to identify unmet needs. These forums, to be held in other locations statewide in the coming year, are being conducted to gather public input that will be used to develop the next Alaska State Plan for Senior Services, FY2012-2016. This document, prepared every four years, provides the State with a guide for delivering senior services and meets the requirement of the U.S. Administration on Aging for the state to access funding from the Older Americans Act which provides federal funding for a range of senior programs. Although these forums will be ongoing, Anchorage and Kotzebue participants identified the following issues as the most important:


- Provide improved access to quality and affordable health care, long-term supports that include home- and community-based services in communities where older Alaskans live, and promote disease prevention and wellness programs;
- Promote financial security, increase affordable senior housing, and improve elder safety;
- Provide safe, dependable, and affordable coordinated community transportation services so that seniors/elders can get to medical appointments and remain actively engaged in their communities;
- Enhance information and assistance services to help individuals access long-term support services and make informed decisions regarding their care.

Upon retirement, more seniors are choosing Alaska as their lifelong home to be close to family, friends and the unique Alaskan lifestyle. For the first time, Alaska is now the state with the fastest growing senior population, according to the U.S. Administration on Aging (2008), replacing Nevada, which held that position for many years. Alaska is home to approximately 80,000 persons aged 60 years and older who comprise about 12% of the state's population (Alaska Department of Labor). Alaska's senior population is expected to increase by four to six percent each year through 2020, as baby boomers become of age, by which time the total number of seniors will grow by almost 64 percent. The oldest Alaska seniors, 85 and older, are expected to triple during the next 25 years, vastly increasing the number of Alaskans living with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders.

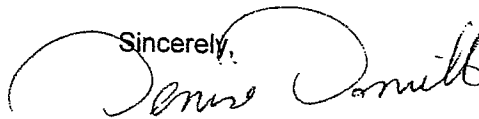
Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov) for additional information about these issues or with any questions concerning Alaska's senior population.

The Alaska Commission on Aging will be meeting in Juneau February 10th-12th, 2010 and hopes to schedule a meeting with you to discuss our priorities in person. We look forward to working with you this legislative session. We appreciate your consideration of these advocacy priorities and thank you for your support of services for older Alaskans.

Sincerely,


Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,


Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director