



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 3, 2014

Representative Mike Hawker
Alaska State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for HB 263

Dear Representative Hawker:

Since 2007, the Senior Benefits program is an invaluable safety-net program for modest-income older Alaskans who live on small fixed incomes to assist them to live with dignity and independence in their home communities. Because this program provides a critical financial safety net for seniors, the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) enthusiastically supports the extension of the sunset date.

The risk of living in poverty in later life increases with age and varies by race, gender, marital status and age. The risk of poverty is far greater for seniors who are older than 75 years, persons living alone, as well as for widowed women and those of minority status. These older Alaskans have little or no cushion to meet any emergency needs, let alone afford basic life necessities.

The Senior Benefits program provides tiered monthly payments to older Alaskans, up to 175% federal poverty level. While these monthly payments are not large amounts, they make a difference in whether or not an older person is able to afford food, rent, fuel, medication, and other necessities. This cash benefit helps low-income seniors to live with dignity and independence within their communities which has a positive impact on senior health and well-being.

The Alaska Commission on Aging strongly recommends that the 2014 Legislature vote to extend the sunset date for the Senior Benefits program, enabling the program to continue to support those seniors most vulnerable to economic stresses. We applaud your leadership, Representative Hawker, for initiating this program and continued support for its sunset extensions. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you require additional information. Thank you so much for your support of this important program for older Alaskans.

Sincerely,


Mary E. Shields
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,


Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director