



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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November 2, 2017

The Honorable Neal Foster, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Paul Seaton, Co-Chair  
House Finance Committee  
Alaska State Capitol, Rooms 410 and 505  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Regarding: Support of SB 54, Criminal Justice Reform Amendments

Dear Chair Seaton and Chair Foster:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA and "the Commission") is pleased to offer its support for SB 54, the Crime and Sentencing bill, sponsored by Senator John Coghill and Senator Peter Micciche. By statute, the Commission is responsible for planning services for seniors, educating Alaskans about senior issues, and making recommendations to elected officials and other policymakers concerning matters that affect Alaska's seniors and their family caregivers, including people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Alaska seniors are very concerned about public safety and the impact on the health and welfare of their families, friends, and communities where they live. Crime rates have been steadily on the rise for many years especially for violent crime and property crime, which have been increasing prior to reform efforts of Alaska's criminal justice system. Factors contributing to an increase in criminal activity may include Alaska's economic recession, rising unemployment, increasing misuse of prescription drugs and other substances, lack of affordable housing, as well as state budget reductions that limit the availability of peace officers and community treatment programs for people with substance misuse and mental health disorders.

ACoA is interested in this issue because of the growing number of older inmates in Alaska's prison system. According to the Department of Corrections, prisoners age 50 years and older represent the fastest growing inmate population. Moreover, the prisoner population of inmates age 65 years and older has increased 33% in just the last three years - from 82 senior offenders in 2014 to 109 aging inmates in 2017. Forty-five percent of these offenders have ten or more years remaining to serve out their prison sentences.

According to a recent presentation by the Department of Corrections to the Commission on Aging (September 2017), approximately one in ten inmates over age 65 display signs of dementia and other conditions related to the aging process. These individuals are often not safe living in the general inmate population as this loud and confusing setting can trigger challenging behaviors among persons with dementia. Many of the reforms in SB 91 to help people with addiction and mental health disorders access appropriate treatment could also be used to support development of a healthy aging program for older inmates that would provide activities to target memory loss, improve balance and strength, promote social involvement, and increase physical activity. This program could help to reduce recidivism rates and successful re-entry to the community for older returning citizens.

The Commission thanks you for your deliberations on SB 54 and its recommendations to improve public safety. We also appreciate your consideration of the needs of the aging inmate population and resources to improve their conditions while in prison as well as to promote a successful return to the community.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of David A. Blacketer in blue ink.

David A. Blacketer  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Denise Daniello in blue ink.

Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director