

Testimony Senate Finance Committee

Hearing on Pioneer Home Bill

Good morning to those of you at the Pioneer Home Bill hearing, today. My Name is Charles "Lew" Tobin, and I am the current president of Igloo Number 1 of the Pioneers of Alaska, and have been president of this group for the last 8 years. I am also a Grand Trustee of the Statewide Pioneers of Alaska.

The Pioneers of Alaska are a group of Alaskans that first got together in Nome in 1907. We are now active in 13 towns, cities and villages in Alaska with both a men's and women's igloo in each place. There are between 3,000 and 4,000 members of our 26 igloos still registered. Our overall goal as Pioneers is to promote our state, and provide for the betterment of all its residents.

Our organization has been lobbying for the creation of the Pioneer Homes since the year of our creation in 1907, and we have been behind the expansion and maintenance of these homes ever since. The Pioneers of Alaska has been such ardent promoters of these homes from our beginning because we have been forced to watch with dismay as older residents can no longer afford the costs of living and housing in the state, as they give up their jobs, retire and do not earn enough to maintain their lifestyles. After a life of work creating and building this state, they have to leave it and end their years somewhere else. The Pioneer Homes allow them to stay in the state to be taken care of, respected and honored, and where friends and relatives are near. The Pioneer Homes also able to keep them in state as resources and inspiration for younger people coming after them and to show that the state cares for those who worked towards making it better.

The steep raise in the proposed cost is unsettling for anyone not only in the Pioneer Homes currently, but those on the waiting list. They and their families are having to rethink how they will afford these much higher and suddenly added costs. Very few of us go into group living unless forced to by circumstances of health and financial problems. We would all prefer to remain independent and in charge of every aspect of our lives. Old age robs us of those abilities. These higher costs make it even harder to make choices.

Most people in Pioneer Homes, or old enough to apply, were working at wages far reduced from what they are now. If they have retirement money saved up in company plans and even Social Security, these are generally percentages of these much smaller wages. I am not old compared with many who are in the Pioneer Homes now, but even I can remember working for \$5 an hour and less, up here in Nome when I first came to Alaska, and thinking it was a fair wage. And like me, I am sure many others have had pensions and retirement benefits wiped out as companies we worked for went bankrupt, got bought out, or otherwise lost the employee retirement benefits they thought they would get. Older people I've talked to in Pioneer Homes have confided to me that their grandkids are starting at wages and salaries that are way higher than the last ones these elders received at the tops of their games when they retired. Modern life eats up savings really quickly. The cost of living has increased so much since the original wage earners left working they find it hard to comprehend. Just like your health as you age, your possessions degrade in value, and you can't care for the maintenance on your house or car. Your

ability to augment you income through subsistence and other 'side' projects diminishes, and demands for cash ramp up.

Saving for retirement was never considered an important feature of working until this modern era. Most of my friends never thought they would live this long in Alaska, let alone go into retirement, here. Medical care and even the travel to get to the hospital or doctor is taking a large bite out of older living now. Most of the older people I know are worried about what they will have to trade off in redirected funds or dignity just to stay alive.

Myself, I thoroughly enjoy living in Alaska, still and have been lucky to do so under my own steam, so far. My kids worry about me living alone, however, and want to know I have a back-up plan or place to go when I need it. At 65 I signed up for the Inactive Waiting List at the Pioneer Homes, and even picked out my favorite places, as is required. If I petition to join the Active List to get into a Pioneer Home, I am assuming it will be for some acute change of my situation. If that is the case, even a mandatory 60 day (3 Month) waiting period before I can be assigned a room would be hard to accommodate, let alone a 120 day (6 Month) mandatory waiting period. Why can't that change to something like allowing admission for the Active List as a vacancy opens up in one of the Homes? I am finding that getting older is more of a series of plateaus than a gentle downward slope. You coast along on a fairly level field until something happens and you fall down to the next level and find that plateau, and adjust. Each fall to a lower plateau is accompanied by a traumatic event. It just doesn't give you 3 to 6 months to let you adjust at your own speed.

Of course, I would like you to keep the Pioneer Home Rates as close to the current rates as possible. I have an understanding of them, and have planned as to how they will affect my life and I have come to terms with it. If you must raise rates I would hope you could scale them up over a period of years to accommodate the wages we have earned over the course of our lives, and not to what the current average rates are now all in one jump. Our earning years are over and we can't make up the differences by working harder or longer, anymore.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,

Charles Lewis Tobin

President of Pioneer Igloo # 1 (Nome)

March 9, 2020

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I am writing this message to inform you of the role of the Pioneers of Alaska in the creation and ongoing support to the Pioneer Homes of Alaska. Our organization was behind the creation of the first Pioneer Home in Sitka, Alaska as you already know. The Pioneers of Alaska also played a major role in the expansion of that first home to become the Pioneer Home System we have today. We have been there every step of the way, lobbying, submitting resolutions of support and in getting our members to support the improvement of this system over the past 100 plus years. We also play the watchdog role to make sure our Pioneer Homes are a high quality option for our aged Alaskans.

In addition to the above named support at the legislative level, our Igloos that have Pioneer Homes in their communities, also provide a lot of volunteer based support to those homes in their communities. Our members provide in house activities, and much needed social support to the residents of our Pioneer Homes. This volunteer support is invaluable, and the staff at these Pioneer Homes each year rely more and more on our ongoing volunteer support to help keep our Pioneer Homes a quality option for assisted living in Alaska.

The members of the Pioneers of Alaska are comprised of a demographic that are a very high percentage of active voters. As a group, the Pioneers of Alaska feel it is important to keep our Pioneer Homes open and for the State to continue to operate them. We have been very proud of building this system to care for those who helped to build Alaska in to the great state it is today.

If you need specifics, I can work to get them for you.

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