

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

February 19, 2008

3:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Johnny Ellis, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Bettye Davis
Senator Con Bunde

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lyman Hoffman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 209

"An Act extending the termination date of the Alaska Commission on Aging; and providing for an effective date."

HEARD AND HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 149

"An Act relating to redistribution of used eyeglasses."

HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 209

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DAVIS

01/16/08	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/4/08
01/16/08	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/16/08	(S)	L&C, FIN
02/19/08	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211

BILL: SB 149

SHORT TITLE: REDISTRIBUTION OF USED EYEGLASSES

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) THERRIAULT

03/30/07	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/30/07	(S)	L&C, HES
02/19/08	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 211

WITNESS REGISTER

TOM OBERMEYER

Staff to Senator Davis
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on SB 209 for the sponsor.

PAT SIDMORE, Policy Manager

Senior and Disabilities Services
Department of Health and Social Services (HESS)
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 209.

DENISE DANIELLO, Executive Director

Alaska Commission on Aging
Department of Health and Social Services
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 209.

PAT DAVIDSON,

Division of Legislative Audit
Juneau AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 209.

SENATOR THERRIAULT

Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 149.

DAVE STANCLIFF

Staff to Senator Therriault
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Commented on SB 149 for the sponsor.

HOWARD RIXIE

Aurora Borealis Lions Eyeglass Recycling and Vision Center,
North Pole, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported of SB 149.

ANNETTE ULMER, Chair

Recycling Collection
Juneau Lions Club
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 149.

THERESA GERMAINE, Chair

Zone 7 Lions Club
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 149.

LARRY HARPER, licensed dispensing optician
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 149.

NEIL ATKINSON
Mendenhall Flying Lions Club
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 149.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR JOHNNY ELLIS called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at [3:01:58 PM](#). Present at the call to order were Senators Davis, Bunde and Ellis. Senator Stevens joined the committee a few minutes later.

SB 209-EXTEND ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

[3:03:02 PM](#)

CHAIR ELLIS announced SB 209 to be up for consideration.

[3:03:21 PM](#)

TOM OBERMEYER, staff to Senator Davis, sponsor of SB 209, said this bill extends the Alaska Commission on Aging. The purpose of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to improve the quality of life, services and support for seniors as they age. Objectives include helping seniors attain and maintain personal and financial independence at the highest level for as long as possible and promoting their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health. In addition, the commission tries to help seniors remain in their own homes or chosen communities in the least restrictive settings while keeping them connected to their families and informed and helpful in their communities.

He pointed out the fiscal note describes the fact that continued funding is extended through 2016 and the attached Governor's bill analysis indicates without this continuation, the Section 306 AD of the Older Americans Act of 1965 requires that this type of agency be continued in order to make \$6 million of federal funding available.

MR. OBERMEYER also noted a brief summary of a booklet of the State Plan for Senior Services FY 2008-2011." He also attached a letter from the assistant secretary for the Department of Aging,

Department of Health and Social Services informing them that it had approved this four-year plan.

He urged them to review information on the attached executive summary. For instance, it says Alaska has the highest proportion of baby boomers at 32 percent and that Alaska's senior population is growing faster than in almost any other state. By 2030 the proportion of seniors over 65 will double to 13 percent of the population; people over 60 will make up 17 percent. The summary also indicates that people in their 80s have many more problems getting around and their needs increase. The University's Institute for Social and Economic Research also says that retired Alaskans age 60 and older contributed almost \$1.5 billion to the state's economy in 2004, primarily from retirement income and health care spending - roughly 10 times the total cost of state programs targeting seniors.

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The summary indicates that this state plan focuses on six goals - keeping seniors healthy, active, involved in their communities, insuring access to an integrated array of health and social supports along the continuum of care, supporting families in their efforts to care for loved ones at home and in the community, providing a range of adequate, accessible, secure and affordable housing options for seniors, supporting a stable senior services and health care workforce as well as a range of attractive work opportunities for seniors and insuring that older Alaskans are safe from catastrophic events and protected from personal exploitation, neglect and abuse.

For each item covered by the plan, an annual implementation plan will be created by all interested senior organizations, each committing to work on specific strategies outlined in the plan.

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PAT SIDMORE, Policy Manager, Senior and Disabilities Services, Department of Health and Social Services (HESS), supported SB 209.

[3:10:17 PM](#)

DENISE DANIELLO, Executive Director, Alaska Commission on Aging, Department of Health and Social Services, supported SB 209. She said the mission of the commission is to ensure the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans and to assist them through planning, advocacy, community education and interagency cooperation to lead useful and meaningful lives. It was established in 1982 and satisfies the federal requirement under

the Older Americans Act for states to have an advisory counsel to the state unit on aging (Department of Health and Social Services) comprised of people who are of age to receive services under the Older Americans Act. These services include home delivered meals, transportation, congregate meals served at senior centers, chore, respite, adult day services and so forth.

She said the Commission is responsible for formulating the state plan for senior services and submitting it to the department. They do this in collaboration with about 20 other agencies that develop services for seniors. The Commission also provides recommendations to the department and to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority concerning the integrated comprehensive mental health program regarding the use of monies from the Mental Health Trust Settlement, the income account for persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and seniors who suffer from other behavioral health conditions. They also make recommendations directly to the governor and legislature with respect to legislation regulations and appropriations for programs and services that benefit older Alaskans. With their advocacy partners they have supported successful legislation such as the new senior benefits program, establishment of the Office of Elder Fraud and Assistance, strengthened the penalties for identity theft, added dental coverage for Medicaid eligible adults including doubling the number of slots for WWAMI students to address Alaska's prospective physicians shortage, and secured base funding for flexible long-term supports for people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia and other programs. Pending passage of this legislation, she plans to continue to advocate for services that promote healthy life styles of Alaska's seniors.

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CHAIR ELLIS asked what the trends are for elder abuse.

MS. DANIELLO answered that at least it's starting to be talked about. Years ago this was a taboo subject, but now the number of reported cases is increasing. She noted in the last couple of years that the Commission along with the Division of Seniors and Disabilities Services advocated for increased funding for adult protective services to add two staff members. One of the trends they hadn't seen in previous years is the reporting of elder mistreatment coming from rural areas of Alaska. She has heard they need to enhance reporting because a lot of places are collecting information regarding elder mistreatment and there isn't one centralized place to report harm.

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She also explained that in Alaska elder mistreatment looks a lot different than in other places. For example, it might be somebody taking on somebody else's subsistence fishing rights or fishing permits.

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SENATOR STEVENS said clearly there are going to be a lot more older Alaskans in Alaska in the future and asked why the 65 - 74 age group is expanding so quickly, asking if that would be the baby boomers.

MS. DANIELLO said the baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 and aren't on the chart. She said the 85-plus group is showing the greatest increase in the senior population - and that is the population most in need of services.

SENATOR STEVENS related that Senator Ted Stevens remarked in his address today that Medicare is not solving the problem. Also, he said when he first moved to Kodiak years ago it didn't have many seniors, but now it's a real community with all ages. He thought it was probably in large part due to what the commission had done.

MS. DANIELLO responded that she observed that as well; another factor might be that older people in the 1970s didn't have as many children here, and more people who have children continue to live here.

[3:19:40 PM](#)

PAT DAVIDSON, Division of Legislative Audit, supported SB 209. She said the extension comported with her recommendations. She explained that the audit did notice when the commission moved from the Department of Administration to the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) it dropped the granting aspect to focus its efforts on planning, education and advocating for senior services. The audit noted some statutory language clean up needed to happen to recognize that change; the granting should now show in statute as a responsibility of the department rather than the commission.

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SENATOR DAVIS noted that legislation is going through both houses to make the correction.

[3:22:32 PM](#)

CHAIR ELLIS announced the bill would be held to make sure it was technically correct before moving it on.

SB 149-REDISTRIBUTION OF USED EYEGLASSES

[3:23:03 PM](#)

CHAIR ELLIS announced SB 149 to be up for consideration.

SENATOR THERRIAULT, sponsor of SB 149, said this bill was requested by one of his constituents who are very involved in the Lions Club and its used eyeglass distribution program. He said SB 149 doesn't require the state or those regulated by it to give a green light to the Lion's Club or any nonprofit to recycle the eyeglasses; but it gives the Board of Examiners in Optometry the authority to approve any non profit organization for the distribution and fitting of used eyeglasses.

Section 2 limits the authority of the non-profit approved by the board to distribute and fit the used eye glasses. He said the fitting of the eyeglasses would be done under the written prescription from a licensed physician or optometrist and the service is free.

SENATOR THERRIAULT noted a letter of support from the chair of the Board of Eye Examiners and a resolution of support from the City of North Pole.

CHAIR ELLIS stated that everyone knows what a good organization the Lions Club is.

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SENATOR STEVENS agreed and said one of the cities on Kodiak is named Port Lions after the Lions Club because it helped them relocated after the tidal wave. He respects what they have done and commented that they had done this eyeglasses thing for 50 years. He asked why this legislation is needed now.

SENATOR THERRIAULT replied that it provides authorization language for them to continue what they have already been doing. He said a suggested CS also cleans up the existing language.

[3:28:20 PM](#)

DAVE STANCLIFF, staff to SENATOR THERRIAULT, sponsor of SB 149, explained the drafter cited a board in the original bill that no longer exists. The blank CS eliminated the word "board" and inserted "department" to have broader connotation for any part of the optometrists that might fall under the department and not

this specific board. It has a bunch of repealers at the end to remove all references to the board that has actually been gone since 1980.

CHAIR ELLIS clarified that the change was purely technical.

SENATOR STEVENS moved to adopt CSSB 149(L&C) 25-LS0788\M for discussion purposes. There were no objections and it was so ordered.

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MR. STANCLIFF explained that the Lions Club has been recognized for distributing eyeglasses internationally for years, but not in this state. SB 149 opens the door to recognize the Lions Club as a legal entity without requiring it to do anything. He also pointed out that language says "a qualified non-profit," language that wouldn't limit their authority to recognize other clubs.

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HOWARD RIXIE, Aurora Borealis Lions Eyeglass Recycling and Vision Center, North Pole, said he also represents the 75-plus Lions Clubs across Alaska and that they all supported SB 149. He related that in 1929 Helen Keller asked the Lions to help fix preventable blindness. He urged Senator Therriault to sponsor this bill because of two projects the Lions support - eye glass recycling and eye care for the needy. Approximately 1500 people are referred annually to the Lions Club for eye exams, eye glasses and sometimes major eye care like surgeries.

He explained the way the process typically works is someone refers a needy client to the Club that refers him to a local state public assistance or health services representative to establish the validity of the need. If he is found to be truly in need, he is referred to a Lions Club to sponsor him financially. In the Interior the Club has a standing agreement with local eye doctors to provide eye exams at a flat rate of \$60 and eyeglasses at a flat rate of \$110 for a total of \$170 per person. The cost of their eye care programs for the needy is daunting; many times valid persons have to go on a waiting list until resources become available.

Their other project, the eyeglass recycling project, involves approximately 30,000 to 40,000 pairs of eyeglasses being collected and sent to their recycling center in North Pole. At that location, volunteers sort, clean, inspect, repair, package and ship approximately 30,000 pairs of glasses throughout the

world to support vision care health missions in the third world countries. All this is happening while many people in Alaska go without.

The Lions researched whether eyeglasses could be redistributed in Alaska. They were told the Alaska laws don't preclude it or enable it. To make sure they stood on firm footing and don't violate any statute, they urged the drafting of SB 149. In the end they envision each eye doctor donating one or two Saturdays a year to give free eye exams. They hope that somewhere amongst their thousands of ready-to-wear eye glasses there will be a pair that meets the doctors' prescriptions. He said Lions don't want to "corner the market" on filling this need, they just want the statute to be enabling.

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MR. RIXIE said some say they are taking income making opportunities away from eye care professionals. But he argued if the Lions didn't serve the needy people, they would never get an eye exam or a pair of glasses. These folks are not active consumers in the eye care industry, and they won't become one until they have a job that produces sufficient income or a way of life that places quality of vision, sufficiently high enough for them to act as consumers. Most of the people they deal with are homeless, battered or displaced and/or severely poor.

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ANNETTE ULMER, Juneau Lions Club, said she chairs the recycling collection program and she supported SB 149. She has picked up approximately 236 glasses provided by the local optometrists. She echoed the need for a service like this; it enables the person not to have to consider eyeglasses a luxury.

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THERESA GERMAINE, chair, Zone 7 Lions Club, Southeast Alaska 49A, supported SB 149. She stated this organization truly provides a service to the community in providing the gift of sight to many individuals. She said they send eyeglasses to third world countries and don't want to take away from that, but they want to have the ability to provide for Alaska's own people as well - especially people in rural communities that don't have eye doctors.

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LARRY HARPER, licensed dispensing optician, said the Lions Club is probably the most prominent organization for eye care and that he supported SB 149.

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NEIL ATKINSON, Mendenhall Flying Lions Club, supported SB 149. The Lions Club is having a worldwide campaign to bring sight to the needy, and this is one thing it can do for Alaska's people. He said the local clubs have purchased a vision screener, so that eye problems of children up to nine years old can be accurately detected. It is a first step for these children who are then referred to eye doctors. Eye care is a major problem within the state; it is a primary requirement to be a functioning person in the state.

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CHAIR ELLIS said he appreciated his community service and closed the public hearing. Senator Therriault said he would work on wording. There being no further business to come before the committee, he adjourned the meeting at [3:48:13 PM](#).