



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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March 17, 2014

The Honorable Pete Kelly, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
Alaska State Capitol, Rooms 516 & 518  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1182

**Subject: Support for Senior Home- and Community-Based Grant Program Funds, Alaska Heating Assistance Program, & the Complex Behavior Collaborative (HB 267 & HB 266, Operating Budget)**

Dear Chair Kelly and Chair Meyer:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) extends our sincere thanks and appreciation for your support of funding for programs serving older Alaskans, specifically the senior grant-funded services administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. During these times of fiscal constraint, we recognize the difficult budget decisions you are called upon to make. We want to take this opportunity to share with you how important these services are for older Alaskans and their family caregivers.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program and the Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services senior community grant programs support family caregivers and help Alaskan seniors enjoy a higher quality of life at home and in their communities. These services reduce the need for higher cost care and promote greater efficiencies in public spending. We appreciate your consideration of increased funding as described in the Mental Health Operating Budget, HB 267.

- **\$200,000 National Family Caregiver Support Program, Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, Senior Community Based Grants.** Family caregivers are the heart and soul of Alaska's long-term care system. They contribute significantly to the cost of care for vulnerable elderly Alaskans, including a growing number of older people with Alzheimer's disease, and youth being raised by older caregivers, usually their grandparents. The proposed increase will serve an increased number of caregivers with respite, training, case management, counseling and other support services. Caregiver support services help seniors remain in their homes and children out of foster care. Research indicates that caregivers of persons with dementia who are supported with respite, training, and counseling stayed home on average 18 months longer than caregivers receiving no supports (Mittelman 2008). According to the U.S. Administration on Aging (2011), 41% of caregivers surveyed reported that without family caregiver supports, the care recipient would not live in the same residence, with 32% of them stating that the care recipient would be in an assisted living or nursing home. Family caregiver support services support families to care for their loved ones at home and save the state money by preventing elders from going into costly institutions and children out of foster care.
- **\$345,000 Nutrition, Transportation & Support Services, Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, Senior Community Based Grants.** These services provide a safety net for all older Alaskans age 60 and older, targeting those whose health and welfare are at highest risk including older persons who do not qualify

for the Medicaid waiver because they do not meet level of care requirements but still need assistance; those recovering from a hospital stay due to a fall, illness or surgery; and older persons transitioning from the assisted living home or skilled nursing facility back home. These services provide congregate meals served in senior centers, adult day programs, and other group settings; home-delivered meals and a welfare check; assisted transportation; and homemaker services. These services are low cost (\$426 annually per senior recipient) evidence-based strategies that help seniors sustain their health and independence and save money by delaying the need for higher cost care. Eighty-five percent of older adults surveyed by the U.S. Administration on Aging (2010) who receive these core services reported that this assistance helped them to remain at home. Research conducted by the Health Research and Educational Trust (2013) found that states which invest more in core senior services spend less on higher cost care for their elderly residents. Specifically, for every \$25 states spend on home-delivered meals, there is a 1% reduction in the number of new residents with low-care needs admitted to the nursing home.

ACoA is concerned about the impact of the proposed \$2 million reduction recommended by the House Finance Committee on the **Alaska Heating Assistance Program** (HB 266) administered by the Division of Public Assistance on the health and welfare of elderly Alaskans on a fixed income. In FY2013, the Alaska Heating Assistance program served 13,678 households of which 4,179 (or 31%) had an elderly member. The tribal heating assistance program served an additional 6,775 households, many of which include an elderly member. In total, the State's Heating Assistance Program served 20,453 households in FY2013 (Division of Public Assistance 2014). During the winter, older people often spend much of their day at home with many living in older, poorly insulated, and drafty homes. In order to save money, some seniors turn down their thermostats way low, use their kitchen stoves for heat, and cut back on food and medication expenditures in order to afford energy to heat their homes. These cost-cutting measures often compromise the health and quality of life for Alaska's elderly citizens. We ask that you maintain funding levels for this program as proposed by the Governor's FY2015 budget.

The Commission supports annualized funding as approved by the House Finance Committee for the **Alaska Complex Behavior Collaborative**, Division of Behavioral Health, which serves vulnerable Alaskans with complex behaviors, including those with Alzheimer's disease, mental illness and developmental disabilities by providing intensive consultation, caregiver training, and technical assistance. These services provide community-based services and prevent the need for institutional care outside of the state.

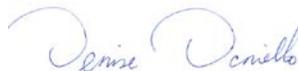
The Alaska Commission on Aging appreciates your thoughtful consideration of these budget items that help older Alaskans live with dignity in their homes and communities and provide support for family caregivers. These services save the state money by preventing older people from prematurely going into costly institutions. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, by phone (465-4879) or email ([denise.daniello@alaska.gov](mailto:denise.daniello@alaska.gov)) for further information. Thank you for your commitment and dedication serving Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Mary E. Shields  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Anna Fairclough, Vice-Chair  
Senator Mike Dunleavy  
Senator Click Bishop  
Senator Donald Olson  
Senator Lyman Hoffman