



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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April 10, 2014

The Honorable Kevin Meyer
Conference Committee Member
Alaska State Capitol, Room 518
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: ACoA Support for Nutrition, Transportation & Support Services, Alaska Heating Assistance Program, and the SHARP Program (HB 266 & HB 267 Operating Budget)

Dear Senator Meyer:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) respectfully encourages your support of the following three budget items that are important to older Alaskans and will be considered by the Conference Committee. We believe that these programs are fiscally responsible because they provide appropriate interventions that reduce the need for higher cost hospitalization and long-term institutional care, address the health and safety needs of older Alaskans, and provide incentives to increase the number of targeted health care professionals in Alaska.

- **\$545,000 for Nutrition, Transportation, & Supports, DHSS Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, Senior Community Based Grants.** These low-cost essential services (\$426 average annual amount per senior) provide a critical safety net for Alaskans age 60 years and older targeting vulnerable seniors whose health and welfare are at highest risk and do not qualify for Medicaid services. Home-delivered meals, congregate meals, assisted transportation, and homemaker services help older Alaskans to “age in place” and serve many of the frailest elderly, including those who are homebound. In FY2013, this program served 11,238 seniors (unduplicated count). Increased funding will serve additional seniors who need these core services as the result of the growing senior population; provide support for their family caregivers; and enhance quality of life, safety, and social interaction for older Alaskans.
- **Maintain funding as proposed in the Governor’s FY2015 budget for the Alaska Heating Assistance Program, DHSS Division of Public Assistance.** In FY2013, the Alaska Heating Assistance Program served 13,678 income-eligible households of which 4,179 (31%) had an elderly member. The tribal heating assistance programs served an additional 6,775 households, many of which include Native Elders (Division of Public Assistance 2014). During the winter, older people spend much of their day at home with many living in older, poorly insulated and drafty homes. In order to save money, some seniors may turn down their thermostats way low, use their kitchen stoves for heat, and cut back on food and medication expenditures in order to save money and heat their homes. The Alaska Heating Assistance Program is important for elderly people on a fixed income so that they can afford to stay warm and not resort to cost-cutting measures that may jeopardize their health and safety.
- **Increase funding for the SHARP Program, DHSS Division of Public Health** to adequately fund a loan repayment program and build Alaska’s health care workforce that will enhance recruitment and retention of targeted health care professionals practicing in Alaska’s underserved, health care shortage areas. Older Alaskans represent the largest consumer group of health care services of all age categories.

The Alaska Commission on Aging appreciates your thoughtful consideration of these conference budget items to improve services for older Alaskans. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director by phone (465-4879) or email (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