



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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The Honorable Bill Walker
State of Alaska
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

December 12, 2016

Dear Governor Walker:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA and the "Commission") is your commission within the Department of Health and Social Services established in 1981 for the purpose of helping older Alaskans maintain good health, independence, and dignity through planning, outreach, and advocacy by interagency collaboration. Further, the Commission meets the federal requirement as described in the Older Americans Act Section 306(a)(6)(D) that each state establish an advisory council to advise the state on aging matters. The Commission is comprised of eleven members, seven of whom are public members (with six members being 60 years and older) appointed by you to serve four-year terms.

We would like to share ACoA's legislative priorities and recommendations and to offer our agency as a resource to you and your staff. We hope that you will give the Commission's recommendations serious consideration by advancing these same priorities as part of your Administration's budget and policy agenda in order to improve outcomes for the health and safety of older Alaskans.

The ACoA has three legislative priorities this session. We respectfully encourage your action to:

1. Protect the Senior Safety Net to the greatest extent possible. This "Net" provides critical financial assistance and home- and community-based long-term support services to vulnerable older Alaskans. These core services prevent seniors from becoming Medicaid-eligible requiring higher cost care. When these services are reduced or eliminated, older people become more at risk for declining health and impairment which, in turn, increases the burden of care on family and other natural caregivers, and raises the possibility for expensive out-of-home placement.

The Senior Safety Net includes services administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services such as the senior community grant-funded services (senior meals, transportation, and homemaker services); the Alaskans Living Independently waiver; Medicaid optional services (Personal Care Assistance, Medicaid Adult Dental, hospice, podiatry services); elder protection (Adult Protective Services and the Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman, under the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority); Alaska Senior Benefits (Division of Public Assistance); and Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund (capital budget). A continued investment in these services will support programs across the state which cost effectively help seniors live independently and safely in their homes and communities where they most prefer to be.

2. Provide appropriate supports for family and other natural caregivers for older Alaskans because family caregiving is the foundation of long-term care in Alaska. As Alaska's population ages, family caregiving and natural supports are becoming increasingly important in the care of Alaskans with chronic health conditions, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. Research indicates that family caregivers of older adults with dementia are more likely to report poor health and higher rates of chronic disease, as well as emotional depression and anxiety, than non-caregivers. Family and other natural caregivers who receive training and support services are better able to provide care at home improving the quality of life and safety for both the caregiver and the person under their care. An investment in caregiver supports may result in saving the state, federal government, and individual Alaskans millions of dollars which would otherwise be spent prematurely on higher cost institutional care. The investment in *Adult Day Services, the National Family Caregiver Support Program, and Senior In-Home Services*, services administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services Senior Community Grants program, will help families to continue caring for their loved ones at home for as long as possible by providing the respite, training, case management, and counseling supports they need.

3. Improve capacity to serve Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias and move forward with the proposed 1915(i) Medicaid state plan option to refinance a certain portion of General Funds for programs (such as Adult Day and Senior In-Home) serving income-eligible seniors with dementia and challenging behaviors by (1) providing an appropriate service package that targets persons in need but who do not meet level of care as required by Alaska's current waiver program; (2) maintaining a portion of the existing General Fund grants for Adult Day services, Senior In-Home, and Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Education and Supports program to serve those who require care but do not meet Medicaid eligibility; and (3) improving access to telehealth and assistive technology as appropriate to increase personal independence and caregiver support. In addition, the 1915(i) Medicaid State Plan Option is expected to provide supplemental federal reimbursement to the Pioneer Homes for residents with early to middle stage Alzheimer's who income qualify for assistance but do not meet the level of care required for the 1915(c) waiver. The Pioneer Homes Payment Assistance Program helps to finance the cost of care for these residents with 100% General Funds.

For further information, please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's Executive Director, at 465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov. We sincerely appreciate your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging



Denise L. Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Commissioner Valerie Davidson, Department of Health and Social Services
Jon Sherwood, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Health and Social Services
Duane Mayes, Director, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services
Vickie Wilson, Director, Alaska Pioneer Homes
Monica Windom, Acting Director, Division of Public Assistance
Greg Jones, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
Bryan Butcher, CEO/Executive Director, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation