



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

P.O. Box 110693  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693  
Main: 907.465.3250  
Fax: 907.465.1398

February 2, 2017

Representative Steve Thompson  
Alaska Capitol, Room 500  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Regarding: Support HB16, Training Regarding Non-Apparent Disabilities & Voluntary Disability Designations on State Identification Cards and Driver's License

Dear Representative Thompson:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to renew our support for HB16, as authored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Saddler, Tarr, Gara, Wool, Millett, Stutes, Foster, Wilson, Johnson, Claman, Guttenberg, LeDoux, Grenn, Tuck, Ortiz, Rauscher, Kawasaki, Sullivan-Leonard, Chenault, and Knoff. Although this legislation addresses the needs of all Alaskans with disabilities, the ACoA will focus on the "safety" benefits we perceive for older Alaskans from this legislation, particularly those with concealed impairments that may result from physical or cognitive sources.

Older people who experience non-apparent disabilities are often impacted by the manner in which they respond to sensory stimuli and process information. This behavior can sometimes be misunderstood as resulting from being under the influence of an intoxicant or as purposefully disruptive. For example, hearing loss can result in problems understanding the spoken language and performing complex tasks. Those with anxiety disorders have a tendency to selectively focus and interpret even ambiguous events in a highly threatening way – which can be observed as disruptive behavior. Wandering outside unattended and unprotected is a significant personal safety risk for persons living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Drivers with early stage memory changes are especially likely to minimize the complexity of driving and overestimate their abilities that can lead to unsafe driving. They may also find themselves lost even in familiar surroundings due to diminished short-term memory. Not only do these disabling conditions affect personal safety and the safety of others nearby, but may also impact the outcome of an encounter between a person with a disability and a public safety officer.

The Commission strongly agrees that preserving personal safety and dignity of individuals with disabilities would be greatly improved by having trained public safety officials able to recognize the signs of a person with non-apparent disabilities and have the skills to respond appropriately to them. We greatly appreciate the new requirement as proposed by HB16 for the Alaska Police Standards Council to amend its training curriculum requirements to include training that will enable Alaska police officers, correctional officers, probation officers, and parole officers to recognize people with disabilities, including non-apparent disabilities, to know how to respond appropriately, and possess knowledge about relevant resources to provide assistance. Disability awareness training will advance use of the

“Silver Alert” system and promote greater awareness among public safety officers about the needs of Alaskans with Alzheimer’s disease and other cognitive impairments who have a tendency to wander and become lost, sometimes finding themselves in life-threatening situations. Public safety officers trained in disability awareness will be better able to recognize the signs of a person with dementia in the community and respond appropriately to bring that person to safety.

We thank you for your leadership on HB16 to enhance public safety awareness, improve communication, and increase protection for Alaskans with disabilities.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise L. Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Representative Dan Sadler  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Adam Wool  
Representative Charisse Millett  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Representative Neal Foster  
Representative Tammie Wilson  
Representative DeLena Johnson  
Representative Matt Claman  
Representative David Guttenberg  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Jason Grenn  
Representative Chris Tuck  
Representative Dan Ortiz  
Representative George Rauscher  
Representative Scott Kawasaki  
Representative Colleen Sullivan-Leonard  
Representative Mike Chenault  
Representative Gary Knopp