



## Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2019 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

### Reauthorize the Alaska Senior Benefits Program: Pass HB 236, SB 170

Financial security is a serious worry for many older people living on fixed incomes. Since 2007, Senior Benefits has provided an invaluable resource for older Alaskans who live on small fixed incomes to afford basic necessities. The program provides monthly benefits ranging from \$76 to \$250 to more than 11,000 Alaskan seniors, age 65+, with household incomes from 75 to 175 percent of federal poverty level. Seniors use these benefits to help cover basic living expenses for food, heating, prescription medication, housing, and transportation. HB 236, sponsored by Representative Scott Kawasaki and SB 170, sponsored by Senate President Pete Kelly extend the sunset date for the Senior Benefits Program.

Over the years, growth in the number of seniors participating in the Senior Benefits Program has been modest. Since the last time Senior Benefits was reauthorized in 2014, the annual enrollment figures increased about 2.6% statewide, based on the Commission's estimates, even though the population of people age 65 and older increased 16% during this same timeframe (2014 to 2017). Statewide, about one in seven seniors (or 13.8%) age 65+ participates in the Senior Benefits Program.

The risk of living in poverty increases with age, as older people spend down their assets on health care and living expenses. Older Alaskans most likely to benefit from Senior Benefits include seniors who:

- Live alone;
- Worked low paying jobs being unable to save much while they were working and are now receiving minimal Social Security benefits;
- Live subsistence lifestyles in rural and remote communities with little cash income;
- Full-time homemakers and stay-at-home parents who worked outside of the paid workforce; and
- The oldest old – people in the 80s, 90s, and a growing number of Centenarians – who spend increasing amounts of their fixed incomes on health and basic necessities.

In September 2017, the House Health and Social Services Committee sponsored a listening session for public members to express their views about how Senior Benefits assists low-income seniors. More than 50 public members provided testimony expressing strong support for the continuation of Senior Benefits. The Commission on Aging believes Senior Benefits is good public policy that provides support for older Alaskans who are most vulnerable to economic stresses and allows them to live with dignity and independence, which has a positive impact on senior health and well-being. **Without passage of legislation this session, the Senior Benefits program will end on June 30, 2018!**

Census Area	Number of Recipients	Census Area	Number of Recipients
Aleutians East	24	Lake and Peninsula	36
Aleutians West	30	Mat-Su	1,583
Anchorage	4,231	Nome	237
Bethel	526	North Slope	33
Bristol Bay	10	NW Arctic	158
Denali	16	Petersburg	89
Dillingham	116	Prince of Wales	206
Fairbanks N Star	872	SE Fairbanks	206
Haines	84	Sitka	98
Hoonah-Angoon	76	Skagway	8
Juneau	349	Valdez / Cordova	156
Kenai	1,177	Wrangell	87
Ketchikan Gateway	269	Yakutat	16
Kodiak	236	Yukon / Koyukuk	252
Kusilvak	231	GRAND TOTAL	11,412

Division of Public Assistance: Recipients Statewide as of April 2017  
([http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Documents/dpa/pdf/SBP\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Documents/dpa/pdf/SBP_Fact_Sheet.pdf))

