



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 2, 2018

Senator Pete Kelly
Alaska State Capitol, Room 111
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Regarding: Support for SB 170, Extending the Alaska Senior Benefits Program

Dear Senator Kelly:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer its support for SB 170 authored by you and co-sponsored by Senators Wilson and Hughes. Since 2007, the Alaska Senior Benefits Program has provided an invaluable resource for modest-income older Alaskans who live on small fixed incomes to afford basic life necessities. In the last statewide senior survey conducted by ACoA in 2015, senior participants identified financial security as the #2 most pressing issue confronting seniors behind access to health care services.

The risk of living in poverty increases in later life and varies by race, gender, marital status, and age. The risk of poverty is far greater for seniors who are 75 years and older, as well as for persons living alone, widowed women, and those of minority status. According to the Division of Public Assistance (2017), the average age of recipients is 75 and the maximum age is 103. Typically, seniors who receive Senior Benefits are older and often have little or no cushion to meet emergency needs, let alone to afford basic life necessities.

The Senior Benefits Program provides tiered monthly payments to older Alaskans, up to 175% of the federal poverty level for Alaska. While the monthly payments are not large amounts, they make a difference in whether or not an older person is able to live comfortably and afford food, rent, heating fuel, medication, and other necessities. This cash benefit helps low-income seniors to live with dignity and independence in their home communities which has a positive impact on senior health and well-being.

Without legislative action this session, the Senior Benefits Program will end on June 30, 2018. The Commission on Aging strongly recommends passage of legislation to extend the sunset date for the Senior Benefits Program. We thank you for your leadership, Senator Kelly, of SB 170 that will allow the program to continue and protect seniors most vulnerable to economic stresses. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of David A. Blacketer in blue ink.

David A. Blacketer
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Denise Daniello in blue ink.

Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator David Wilson
Senator Shelley Hughes