April 6, 2016

Chair Peter Micciche, Senate Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
Alaska Capitol, Room
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Chair Dan Saddler, House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
Alaska Capitol, Room
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Regarding: SB 139 and HB 256 Operating Budget, Pioneer Home Waitlist Annual Fee

Dear Senator Micciche and Representative Sadler:

The Alaska Commission on Aging is a Governor-appointed body within the Department of Health and Social Services that serves to ensure the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans by addressing their needs through planning, advocacy, and education through interagency coordination efforts. Although we recognize that the operating budget, with the exception of conference-able items, has been approved by the Legislature, the Commission would like to take this opportunity to inform you about the considerable public input we have recently received regarding the proposed $100 annual fee for seniors (persons age 65+) to reserve a place on the Pioneer Home waitlist. This requirement is a budget item identified in the close-out documents for SB139 (item 85, line 451) and HB 256 (page 1, Pioneer Homes) (attached).

The Commission is concerned that the proposed annual $100 fee could impose a significant financial hardship on seniors with limited incomes at/below poverty level. While seniors with moderate and higher incomes may be able to afford the $100 annual fee, those who are low-income are often hard-pressed to pay for life essentials such as food, housing, heat/utilities, and prescription medications. These vulnerable seniors are the ones who are most in need of the care provided by the Pioneer Homes and will most likely be least able to afford the fee and as a result, drop off the waitlist.

The Commission respectfully proposes the following recommendations for your consideration regarding the proposed Pioneer Home annual waitlist fee:

- Waive the $100 annual fee for seniors who income-qualify for Public Assistance or Medicaid programs as these older people are financially vulnerable and least able to afford an extra expense.
- Hold harmless seniors who are already on the waitlist and impose the annual fee only on those who are new to the waitlist and have the means to make the annual payment.
• Implement a voluntary $100 deduction from the senior’s Permanent Fund Dividend to cover the annual waitlist fee to ensure that the fee is paid on time; this is especially important for individuals with memory loss. In addition, this voluntary deduction would help to reduce the administrative burden on the Pioneer Homes as there is no added funding to hire new staff in the operating budget for the Homes to collect the waitlist fees.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on the Pioneer Home annual waitlist fee. Please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA’s executive director, for additional information at denise.daniello@alaska.gov or 465-4879.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Shields
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Pete Kelly, Co-Chair of Senate Finance
    Senator Anna MacKinnon, Co-Chair Senate Finance
    Representative Mark Neuman, Co-Chair House Finance
    Representative Steve Thompson, Co-Chair House Finance