



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA PIONEER HOMES

P.O. Box 110690  
Juneau, Alaska  
99811-0690

Main: 907.465.4416  
Toll free: 888-355-3117  
Fax: 907.465.4108

Pioneer Homes Advisory Board

December 27, 2016

The Honorable Bill Walker, Governor  
State of Alaska  
PO Box 110001  
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Governor Walker,

First, thank you for your dedicated service. The Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board (APHAB) has continued to conduct monthly telephonic meetings. When the APHAB was formed and placed in Statues, it was to ensure that proper care and support were being provided for our resident seniors. The board fulfills their duties by visiting our Pioneer Homes and meeting with Administrators, residents, families and staff. We also tour the homes to see the care in action. We look at the upkeep and cleanliness of the facilities, how resident care is administered, and listen to concerns or suggestion for improvements. We find the residents are well informed and those that are able to be involved, outspoken. Our intent is to be the eyes and ears of your office and to relay the opinions of the residents and staff through recommendations contained herein.

The board in the past has held the one allowed face-to-face meetings in Juneau during session. This year we chose to hold our meeting in Anchorage for a number of reasons. First was the consideration of cost. The need for expensive travel was less and we were able to stay at the Anchorage Pioneer Home to reduce the accommodations cost. We also ate two meals a day at the homes giving us the opportunity to sit with different residents and hear from them in a more informal setting. We also did so to coincide with the Administrators and Director's face-to-face meeting. The combined group discussed efficiencies and the changes that are occurring due to budget reductions.

The major concern was reduced funding. The previous reductions resulted in fewer available beds and less seniors served. The wait lists are long and growing and while the board understands that we cannot house them all we feel we should suggest maximizing our potential. There are beds sitting empty due to the lack of personnel to manage them. Further cuts will result in less beds, growth of the wait list and the fact that some seniors will simply die before

having the opportunity for care in our homes. The Alaska Pioneer Homes serve some of the most needy senior population in Alaska.

Our board strives to be responsible first to the residents we serve and to your office. We take serious the concerns of our finances and have taken many actions on our own to reduce as much cost as possible. This board is dedicated to the advocacy of our homes and their residents. Please see attachments regarding findings and recommendations.

Respectfully,



Bob Sivertsen, Chairperson

Enclosure: Executive Summary/Recommendations

cc:

Vickie Wilson, Division Director

Clinton Lasley, Division Admin Operations Manager II

Board Members:

Pamela Beale

David Blacketer

Rosemary Hagevig

Hollis Hall

Robert Hall, Sr.

Jana Shockman

Ronald Siebels;

Home Administrators:

Dayna Arnold, Sitka Pioneer Home

Angie Howard, Fairbanks Pioneer Home

Joshua Shaver, Alaska Veteran's & Pioneers Home (Palmer)

Richard Saville, Anchorage Pioneer Home

Julie Sande, Ketchikan Pioneer Home

Gina Del Rosario, Juneau Pioneer Home

For your consideration:

On November 15-17, 2016 the Alaska Pioneer Home Advisory Board met in Anchorage. The Advisory Board was fortunate to have in attendance Vickie Wilson (Alaska Pioneer Homes Director), and the Administrators of all six homes. A full spectrum of facility issues and resident concerns were discussed and a tour of the Pharmacy by Chief Pharmacist Lana Bell was conducted. Members of the Advisory Board also attended open forum meetings with residents in the Anchorage and Palmer homes.

Unsolicited laudatory comments from numerous residents provided clear evidence that Pioneer Home Residents are quite pleased with the consistent care and individual respect they receive from the Home Administrators and employees.

Executive Summary/Recommendations:

1. One thing we must always remember is that getting old is not an option; it is a fact of life. *Recommendation/request: We request that every elected and appointed state official remain consistently aware of this fact while conducting their duties and responsibilities.*

2. The Board closely examined the effects of rate increases and how those cost changes are affecting the fixed fiscal resources of Pioneer Home Residents. *Recommendation/request: The Board will continue to evaluate this economic issue with consideration for the wide range of individual and state budget capabilities.*

3. There is strong consensus that any additional Pioneer Home budget cuts will create a detrimental impact on the ability to provide the level of care to the number of residents that the State operated homes have been able to provide. Mandated health and safety regulations cannot be set aside to preserve precious funds, and they cannot be absorbed into other operational aspects. *Recommendation/request: The Board contends that all six homes and the pharmacy remain under State control. For myriad problematic reasons Pioneer Home privatization should not be considered as a whole. Consideration of contracted service where reasonable cost savings could be realized without sacrificing service should continue to be explored, such as food or janitorial services.*

4. Staff cuts due to budget considerations have unfortunately placed the homes near the precipice of operational disadvantage. It is critical that all Pioneer Homes remain adequately staffed to meet the compassionate and consistent quality of life needs for the aging residents and the requirements of mandated care. *Recommendation/request: The Board believes that staff shortages must be addressed so that each Pioneer Home can continue to provide an appropriate level of deserving care necessary for every resident. We should study our staffing requirements to best utilize our facilities capacity for the growing Alaska senior population.*

5. Occupancy waiting lists and the reasons for them are a continuing concern. A concern that will surely increase in severity as the baby boomer generation ages into the arena of needing care

assistance. The Alaska population is growing and age progression exists. This must be addressed with serious consideration. Available bed space will obviously remain a central concern and future bed space needs should not remain in the shadows of legislative planning. Again, growing old is not an option.

*Recommendation/request: The Board respectfully asks the Governor and the Legislatures consideration of the impact this issue will have on Alaska's aging population. It is critical that the Alaska legislature plans for elderly care and incorporates budget support considerations into its future agenda.*

6. There is a pressing need to prevent caustic fumes from entering the Anchorage pharmacy. The pharmacy is space limited and is located in the basement complex of the Anchorage facility with no natural lighting or ventilation. The problem occurs when trucks enter and depart from the loading/unloading dock at the facility. The close proximity of the pharmacy air inlet and truck exhaust on the loading dock creates a distinct air quality problem for the pharmacy employees and the medicines contained therein.

*Recommendation/request: The Board feels that this is a serious but preventable health problem that cannot be ignored. The Board believes that an appropriate engineering study be initiated as soon as possible, followed by a cost conscious facility upgrade that avoids any potential issues.*

7. As in most programs, the Pioneer Homes face the ongoing issues of employee turnover and staff training. To confront this issue head-on an Apprenticeship Training Program is planned. We believe that this will produce long-term benefits as well as provide employees with clear job awareness, continuity of appropriate resident care, and adherence to regulatory mandates.

*Recommendation/request: The Board respectfully asks the Governor to support the planning and implementation of this Apprenticeship program.*

8. The Board believes that every Pioneer Home Administrator should be commended for willingly accepting the state budget limitations with a professional understanding, while still providing excellent care to every level of resident occupancy. This requires increased time-consuming attention from each Home Administrator. We must also acknowledge that certain changes have a pronounced "worry" effect on residents who grow accustomed to and depend on lifestyle stability.

*Recommendation/request: The Board has no recommendation or request concerning this specific comment. Our satisfaction exists in having the gift of association with a capable, dedicated, and conscientious Home Management workforce.*

Submitted by the Alaska Pioneer Advisory Board, December 2016

Bob Sivertsen, Chairman

David Blacketer      Hollis D. Hall

Jana Shockman      Pamala Beale

Bert Hall              Ron Siebels

Rosemary Hagevig