



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of  
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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February 21, 2018

Representative Matt Claman  
Alaska State Capitol, Room  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

**Subject: Support for CSHB 106, Civil Legal Services Fund**

Dear Representative Claman:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our continued support for CSHB 106, a bill sponsored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Gara, Kopp, LeDoux, Edgmon, Kito, Guttenberg, Kawasaki, Parish, Tarr and Josephson to establish a mechanism that funds civil legal services for low-income individuals, veterans, and older Alaskans. While the original legislation allowed the Legislature to appropriate up to 25% of the filing fees paid annually to the Alaska Court System for the civil legal services fund, the current CSHB 106 allows for a maximum annual appropriation up to 5% of the court filing fees, or \$126,500 based on current estimates. In FY2016, the legislature appropriated \$450,000 to the civil legal services fund, according to information provided by Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC). The Commission on Aging is concerned that the lowered percentage in court filing fees proposed by CSHB 106 may compromise the ability of nonprofit organizations, such as ALSC, to successfully leverage resources to maintain services in urban and rural locations statewide that would result in fewer qualifying Alaskans receiving civil legal aid. Providing these services in rural locations is particularly expensive. A reduced funding level may result in closing rural-based offices limiting access to civil assistance for rural-based veterans, older Alaskans, and other vulnerable people as well as reduced services for eligible persons residing in urban areas.

Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), a nonprofit civil legal aid agency that has provided no-cost civil legal assistance to low-income Alaskans for over 50 years, is an example of an organization that would benefit from this legislation. ALSC is the sole statewide agency that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income seniors, veterans, and other eligible Alaskans.

Legal assistance for seniors is provided statewide by ALSC and assures that seniors, especially those at greatest social and economic risk, have access to the civil justice system. Last year, Alaska Legal Services provided direct legal aid to more than 1,500 seniors and 171 caregivers statewide. ALSC helps seniors establish Miller Trusts, power of attorney, advance directives and wills; prevents seniors from losing their housing due to predatory lending practices, illegal foreclosure or eviction, and renter-landlord disputes; and helps seniors obtain and maintain Social Security benefits.

The Commission supports CSHB 106 however asks that the legislature reconsider the reduced appropriation of court filing fees in light of the potential impact on seniors and other low-income Alaskans having equal access to our civil justice system. The provision of legal information, advice, and assistance helps older Alaskans to preserve their financial and personal independence, retain control of their financial and health care decisions, maintain appropriate family relationships, and protect their personal assets and well-being. Please feel free to include the Commission's letter in the bill packet for CSHB 106. Thank you and the bill's co-

sponsors for championing this important legislation to improve access to the civil justice system by seniors, veterans, and other Alaskans having limited means.

Sincerely,



David A. Blacketer  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Cc: Representative Les Gara  
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux  
Representative Bryce Edgmon  
Representative Sam Kito  
Representative David Guttenberg

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director

Representative Scott Kawasaki  
Representative Justin Parish  
Representative Geran Tarr  
Representative Andy Josephson