



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of
Health and Social Services

ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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April 19, 2017

Representative Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Regarding: Support for HB 236, Extending the Alaska Senior Benefits Program

Dear Representative Kawasaki:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer its support for HB 236 authored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Spohnholz, Fansler, and Tuck. 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. Because Senior Benefits provides a critical financial safety net for seniors, the Commission supports the extension of the sunset date proposed.

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 (2016), the average age of recipients is 75 and the maximum age is 104. 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.

The Commission on Aging recommends passage of this legislation to extend the sunset date for the Senior Benefits Program. We thank you for your leadership, Representative Kawasaki, of HB 263 that will allow the program to continue to protect those 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: Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Zach Fansler

Representative Chris Tuck