

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

*Alaska Commission on Aging*

SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 110693  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0693  
PHONE: (907) 465-3250  
FAX: (907) 465-1398

February 22, 2010

Senator Hollis French  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 417  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

**Subject: Support for SB 276 "Grants for Primary Health Care Services in Physician Shortage Areas"**

Dear Senator French:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our support of SB 276, a bill to establish a grants program to provide supplemental funding to health care facilities that provide primary health care services to older Alaskans age 65 years of age or older and others insured by Medicare. The purpose of this legislation is to increase the availability of primary health care services in physician shortage areas. This legislation is authored by you and co-sponsored by Senator Bettye Davis.

Alaska continues to lead all states in the rate of growth of people age 65 and older; they number 52,260 according to 2009 estimates from the Alaska Department of Labor. In 2005, there were 41,469 persons age 65 years and older enrolled in the Medicare program, according to the Department of Health and Social Services (Alaska Health Care Data Book, 2007). Not only are Alaska seniors growing in number but they are living longer, many with chronic medical conditions and physical disabilities, and require more health care. At the same time, Alaska has a growing shortage of primary care doctors as many providers are preparing to retire.

In recent years, seniors living in Anchorage, the Mat-Su Borough, and Fairbanks have reported difficulty finding primary care physicians who will accept Medicare patients because of Medicare's low reimbursement rates. Many seniors in these communities have turned to their local Community Health Centers (CHCs) for primary care. In 2010, the Alaska Primary Care Association estimates CHCs will serve more than 7,100 seniors who comprise more than 8% of the total Alaska senior population. Based on current trends, the Community Health Centers project they will serve almost 9,700 seniors by 2015.

The ACoA supports SB 276 to improve access to primary health care for older Alaskan Medicare beneficiaries. Limited access to primary care puts older persons at greater risk of developing serious health conditions that could have been abated with timely medical care. Many older Alaskans are struggling to keep up with the rising costs of health care, which threatens their health and financial security. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879), should you have any questions regarding our position. Thank you for sponsoring this legislation.

Sincerely,

  
Sharon Howerton-Clark  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

  
Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Bettye Davis