

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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March 28, 2009

The Honorable Joe Paskvan, Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 7
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for SB 61

Dear Chair Paskvan:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) encourages discussion of SB 61, a bill to insure that Alaska residents have access to affordable health care insurance through the creation of an Alaska health insurance program. This bill is authored by Senator Hollis French and co-sponsored by Senator Johnny Ellis. The Commission supports a state-sponsored program to provide essential health care services, including preventive care and chronic disease management within the primary care setting in addition to appropriate end-of-life care.

Currently, there are an estimated 115,000 uninsured persons in Alaska representing 17% of the state's population. Those without health care insurance are less likely to seek medical care until a health situation develops into a medical crisis which often results in an emergency room visit and more expensive medical care. Not only does this practice result in adverse health outcomes for the uninsured person, but it drives up the cost of health care for everyone.

Although SB 61 does not directly alleviate the problem experienced by many older Alaskans insured by Medicare of finding a primary care physician, AARP (2009) reports that persons aged 50 to 64 years old are among the fastest growing group of those uninsured. Limited access to essential health care services for individuals prior to becoming Medicare-eligible can put these individuals at greater risk of developing chronic health conditions that could have been prevented or better managed with proper medical care at a younger age. Many older Alaskans on fixed incomes are already struggling to keep up with the rising cost of health care that threatens their health and financial security.

ACoA respectfully asks for your consideration of the issues raised by SB61 to develop a state-sponsored health care program that provides an economically stable system to protect the health status of all residents. We hope discussion of the proposed legislation continues among policy makers and the public. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879), should you have any questions regarding our position. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

CC: Senator Joe Thomas, Vice-Chair
Senator Bettye Davis

CC: Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Con Bunde