

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

*Alaska Commission on Aging*

**SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR**

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February 8, 2009

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate  
709 Hart Senate Building  
Washington D.C., 20510

**Sent via FAX: 202-224-5301**

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Alaska is home to more than 76,500 older Alaskans (persons 60 years of age and older), comprising 11% of the State's population, according to the Alaska Department of Labor 2007 estimates. In the U.S. Administration on Aging *2008 Profile of Older Americans* publication, Alaska is reported to have the fastest growing senior population of all states. Over the next 25 years, the growth of the Alaska senior population will be strong and continuous, with the number of seniors expecting to grow at a rate of almost 4% to 6% annually.

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA), a State agency established in 1982, is an eleven member board whose public members are appointed by the governor. ACoA is charged with planning and advocacy for the needs of all older Alaskans. We have particular concern for Alaska's seniors and elders who are most vulnerable – those living in poverty, in isolated rural communities, and those with disabilities and special health care needs. Many of the vitally needed services for these seniors are funded through the programs of the Older Americans Act (OAA). OAA programs provide seniors with nutritious meals, job training, health promotion, transportation, and much more. OAA also protects seniors from abuse and provides support for family caregivers.

The U.S. Senate will soon consider the Economic Stimulus appropriations bill which includes additional funding for Older Americans Act senior nutrition, transportation, and support programs. For Alaska, this additional funding amounts to \$500,000 per year for a total of \$1 million over a two-year period. These basic services promote health and wellness for seniors, providing the support they need to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible and offering long-term cost savings from a reduction of institutional nursing home care spending. We encourage your support of funding for these essential programs.

We also ask for your support of funding to create a Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund in the amount of \$5.8 billion for the implementation of evidence-based prevention and wellness programs developed by the U.S. Administration on Aging. Among older adults, chronic conditions account for nearly 95% of health care expenditures, decreasing their productivity and ability to live independently. These evidence-based prevention grant programs focus on areas that are critical to the health and independence of older people, such as chronic disease self-management, fall prevention, physical activity, and mental health.

We thank you for your consideration of funding for these two programs being proposed in the economic recovery package. Please feel free to contact our office if you would like further information about our position or about issues affecting older Alaskans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon Howerton-Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Sharon Howerton-Clark, Chair  
Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Denise Daniello". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director