

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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January 30, 2010

Representative Cathy Muñoz
Alaska State Capitol, Room 409
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support Letter for HB 270

Dear Representative Muñoz:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer our support of HB 270, a bill to amend the income eligibility threshold for persons requiring nursing home level of care stated in AS 47.07.020(b)(6). This bill is authored by you and co-sponsored by Representatives Paul Seaton, Bob Herron, Max Gruenberg, and Les Gara.

ACoA supports returning the statutory income limit for this benefit from the current fixed dollar amount of \$1,656 per month to 300% of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the previous statutory limit, in order to allow the eligibility limit to adjust annually with the Supplemental Security Income maximum benefit amount. This change will ensure that eligible Alaskans can continue to receive nursing home care and in-home services provided by the State's Medicaid program when they receive cost-of-living adjustments to their Social Security and other benefit amounts.

In 2003, the Alaska Legislature changed AS 47.07.020 (b) (6) to freeze the Medicaid long-term services income eligibility limit at that year's level (\$1,656). This change created a fixed ceiling for waiver eligibility, rather than allowing the eligibility limit to adjust annually in tandem with the SSI maximum benefit amount, which is tied to changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The downstream impact of this freeze has been that from 2003 and into the future, a small Social Security cost-of-living adjustment could put a person over the \$1,656 limit, and in effect disqualify many people from the program. Most public assistance programs in Alaska are indexed to the Alaska poverty level or other guidelines which provide flexibility as incomes rise along with living costs.

We thank you for sponsoring HB 270 to ensure that eligible Alaska seniors and other vulnerable Alaskans can maintain their income eligibility and continue to receive home- and community-based services, despite small COLA increases to their Social Security and other benefit payments. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director, by phone (465-4879) or email (denise.daniello@alaska.gov) should you have questions or require additional information. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,


Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Bob Herron

Representative Max Gruenberg
Representative Les Gara