



JUNEAU COMMISSION ON AGING
C/O Office of the Municipal Clerk
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October 1, 2023

Dear Director Sanders

As you are well aware, the older adult (65+) population segment is growing faster than the preschool aged population. The "silver tsunami" well established, and Alaska is following this national trend. Inadequate planning and funding will spell disaster for the future of Alaska's elders. While seniors may represent a big slice of the social services pie, many contribute financially, offer community wisdom, the spirit of volunteerism, and, generally speaking, have mellowed into a peace-keeping power for our society. Many appreciate the beneficent impact of elders in their communities. Furthermore, these are our parents and grandparents and elder states-people and if we don't take care of them we are admitting that we really don't care at all.

It is reasonable to plead for the same level of AK Division of Senior & Disabilities Services funding in FY 24-25 but we ask for a cost-of-living allowance increase. Professional and volunteer elder advocates such as JCOA are working diligently to keep our elders safe, fed, and getting the services they need to maintain quality of life. We are having trouble finding senior-friendly housing - retro-fitting one's home to age in place is often not feasible, or too costly. We are working to boost the eldercare workforce, which suffers from ongoing staff shortages. These efforts take time, with many agencies on board, and a conceptual shift to paying decent wages for these jobs which conventionally have been provided by underpaid women or family members. Prices are rising, and the elder segment of the population keeps growing. Community Grant Services have allowed state funds to stretch towards all these goals, and remain critically necessary.

On a personal note, I have had the pleasure of delivering Meals on Wheels once a week for 8 years and I plan to continue. It just about broke my heart when the Friday meals were discontinued due to lack of adequate funding. I have a Thursday route and I try to ask my clients if they are OK for food over the weekend. But honestly, I'm not sure what I would do if they said "no." Meals on Wheels is one of many programs run by one of many senior service agencies (Catholic Community Service) which collectively rely on state funding to some degree.

The Juneau Commission on Aging asks for your compassion, and policy leverage, to ensure our elders are treasured and their services are adequately funded to provide for their health and wellbeing.

Sincerely
Dr. Emily Kane
Chair, Juneau Commission on Aging