

**Administration on Aging Listening Forum
San Francisco, California
Alaska Commission on Aging Testimony
Wednesday, March 3, 2010**

Good afternoon. My name is Denise Daniello, executive director of the Alaska Commission on Aging, an agency with an 11-member board which is responsible for planning, advocacy, and education on issues related to seniors' well-being. We are located within the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, which is the State Unit on Aging in our state, a single Planning & Service Area. By state statute, we are responsible for making recommendations directly to the governor and to the legislature that affect legislation, regulations, and appropriations for programs and services for older Alaskans. The Commission has authority to develop the comprehensive four-year state plan for senior services required by the U.S. Administration on Aging.

For the second year in a row, Alaska is the state with the fastest growing population of adults age 65 years and older. Between 1998 and 2008, the number of Alaska seniors grew by nearly 50%, which is nearly four times the national average. Alaska is home to more than 85,000 seniors who comprise more than 12% of the state's population. Retired Alaskans as a whole contribute approximately \$1.7 billion annually to the state's economy from their retirement income and health care spending. This source of cash flow is one of our state's top industries on par with tourism and mining.

Alaska is beginning the process of creating a new state plan for senior services this year, to be in place by July 1, 2011. Our current four-year plan was the result of a collaboration among numerous state agencies, statewide and regional non-profit organizations, an Alaska Native tribal health consortium, and other partners. The plan focuses on six overall goals, including healthy lifestyles, the continuum of health and social supports, family caregiving, appropriate housing options, senior care workforce and senior employment, and safety from catastrophic events as well as protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Each year we hold a meeting to examine our collective implementation efforts as well as to identify the most important strategies to focus on in the year to come. We expect to continue this innovative and successful process as we move forward on our next state plan.

We have two Older Americans Act-related concerns we'd like to just touch on today.

- (1) States with small populations get a set minimum amount of OAA funding. Of course, this is preferable to their being funded entirely based on their percentage of the country's senior population. On the other hand, for those like Alaska with fast-growing senior populations (nearly 50% growth of the age 65+ population in the past decade – and 6.6% increase in the 60+ population between 2008 and 2009 alone), it doesn't provide for the additional funding needed to keep up with the pressure of population growth. We'd suggest a funding formula with a "booster" for small-population states that face fast population growth among seniors. Because of the small totals, proportionately more funding would not necessarily amount to a large amount of money.
- (2) As we prepare to begin work on our next state plan for senior services, we look forward to having the results of the 2010 census for population counts of seniors by census area. However, we were distressed to learn that this year's census does not contain any questions about

income. As income levels and number of seniors in poverty are and will continue to be a major factor in our in-state funding formula, we are concerned about obtaining data on this critical demographic factor. We have been told that American Community Survey data (based on sampling rather than a count of everyone) does supply income data – but apparently it’s not as reliable, and perhaps not even available, for many of the small and very small communities we have in Alaska. We would like some guidance on how to approach this issue. Can the AoA intervene to help us get the income data we need?

Assistant Secretary Greenlee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and thank you for convening this meeting.