



Alaska House of Representatives

April 12, 2019

The Honorable Adam Crum
Commissioner-Designee, DHSS
3601 C Street, Suite 902
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

We are writing to express our deep disappointment in the Department of Health and Social Services' April 11, 2019 notice to thousands of low-income seniors that payments through the Senior Benefits program will be suspended in May and June of 2019 due to "insufficient funding."

The 4,731 Senior Benefits recipients who currently receive \$76 per month are some of the most financially vulnerable Alaskans. On average, Senior Benefits recipients are 75 years old and physically unable to pursue job opportunities or other sources of income to make up for the lost payments. While the dollar amount may seem small, it is critically important to the fixed-income seniors who rely on this income. We have heard from public testimony on House Bill 60 that payments provided through the Senior Benefits Program determine whether seniors can afford groceries, transportation to critical medical appointments, or pay their rent. Cutting this program suddenly with two weeks' notice is immoral and reflects poorly on our priorities as a state.

Just last year, legislation to extend the Senior Benefits Program – House Bill 236 – passed the House and Senate with near unanimous support: it had 19 co-sponsors in the House and 16 cross-sponsors in the Senate. The bill extended the Senior Benefits Program until 2024. We request additional details from the Department about how this happened. Specifically:

- If DHSS was aware of this shortfall during the Operating Budget process, why didn't the Department approach the House Finance Committee with a supplemental request or amendment to ensure the program is fully funded?
- DHSS Commissioner-designee Adam Crum controls a \$20 million discretionary fund. Why weren't funds from that account used to avoid this issue?

The Senior Benefits Program helps our elders survive and live independently with dignity in Alaska. We are committed to working with DHSS to secure the funding needed to address this shortfall. We urge the Department to promptly do the right thing and resolve this issue.

Sincerely,

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Bryce Edgmon
Speaker of the House

Handwritten signature of Steve Thompson in black ink.

Steve Thompson
House Majority Leader

Ivy Spohnholz
Anchorage
Co-Chairs, House Health and Social Services Committee



Tiffany Zulkosky
Bethel



Matt Claman
Anchorage



Harriet Drummond
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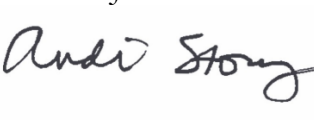
John Lincoln
Kotzebue



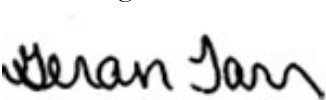
Dan Ortiz
Ketchikan



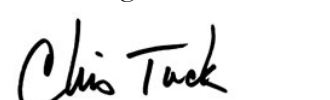
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Juneau



Geran Tarr
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