

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

June 2002

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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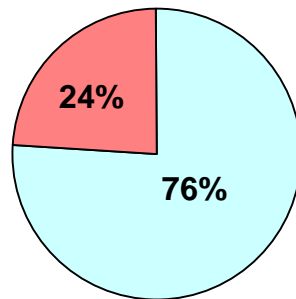
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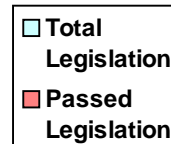
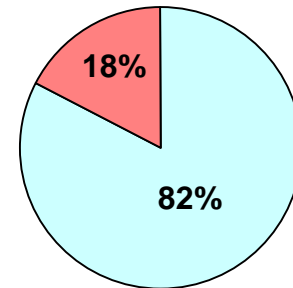
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All Legislation



Senior-Related Legislation



When comparing numbers of bills proposed to numbers of those passed, senior-related legislation fared slightly worse than average in the 22nd Legislative Session. Some bills that didn't pass could have had negative impacts on seniors. Data is approximate, based on Associated Press reports and tallies by ACoA staff.

Legislative Wrap-Up

Fiscal Issues Overshadow Legislation for Seniors and Others

The second session of the 22nd Alaska Legislature closed May 21st after two special sessions. As the third special session, scheduled for this month, is likely to be restricted to a few specific issues, it appears that legislation of particular interest to seniors is now either passed or will need to be resurrected in a new form in the coming session.

Legislation Passed:

The following bills that the Alaska Commission on Aging has tracked this year are at this writing awaiting transmittal to Governor Knowles for signature:

SB 4: Municipal Property Tax Exemptions

SSB 37: Physician Negotiations with Health Insurer

SB 2009: Alaska Veterans Advisory Council (SB 54 in the regular session)

SB 2001: Pioneers' and Veterans' Home/Advisory Board (SB 55 in the regular session)

Governor Knowles may veto this bill because the approved version only addresses veterans currently in the Pioneers' Homes and does not provide funding for the additional beds the original language called for. The Legislature also added a sunset provision to the bill.

HB 162: Absences Under the Longevity Bonus Program

SB 206: Disabled Parking and Registration Plates

HB 225: Alcoholic Beverage Tax

HB 330: Providing Alcohol to Persons Under 21

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22nd Legislative Session Recap (continued)

HB 402: Alaska Temporary Assistance Program
SB 252: Employment and Training Program/Board
SB 295: Licensing: Disclosure of Minors Records
SB 302: Definition of Mental Health Professional
SB 337: Eligibility for Municipal Tax Exemption

In all, 13 of about 61 bills tracked by the Commission passed. Nine of those issues received special attention from the Commission in the form of resolutions supporting or opposing passage.

The Commission supported the following legislation through resolutions:

SB 294/HB 417: Adult Day Services Facilities (Resolution 2002-02).
There are currently no state regulations on adult day services facilities.

HB 483: Procurement of Group Health Insurance for Service Providers (Resolution 2002-03). This legislation would have allowed for the procurement of a group health insurance policy that could reduce the cost and make it affordable for individuals working in these service industries.

SB 55/SB 2001 and HB 88: In support of Pioneers' and Veterans Homes (Resolution 2002-06). Legislation passed in a substantially changed form (see above).

HJR 43: Urging the President and Congress to protect the Social Security Trust Fund (Resolution 2002-09).

In addition to bills, the Commission adopted two resolutions for continued funding of state programs:

Resolution 2002 - 01 In Support of the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation Fiscal Year 2003 Capital Budget. (See Budget.)

Resolution 2002-05 In support of full funding of DHHS budget for Medical Assistance. (See Budget.)

See the section on Budget for more information on these and other funding issues addressed by the Commission during the session.

The Commission adopted two resolutions opposing legislation:

Resolution 2002-04 In Opposition to HB 367: Relating to Denali Kid Care. This legislation sought to reduce eligibility provisions, thus limiting participation in a program that benefits low-income children and their families. This bill died at the end of the Legislative session.

Resolution 2002-07 Relating to SB182: In opposition to pro-rating Basic Supports. The Commission advocates continuing Alaska's basic supports and opposes efforts to pro-rate funding for essential programs that are vital to the health and wellbeing of all Alaskans as we age. This bill also died at the end of the Legislative session. However, it has been raised in the last two sessions, and it may be raised again in the 23rd Legislature.

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Budget (conclusion of Legislative Wrap-Up)

Several items in the State Appropriations Budget particularly affected Alaskan seniors this session. This was an especially tense year for budget items, as cuts continued in an effort to close Alaska's fiscal gap.

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)

The State of Alaska Capital Budget for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation contained funding proposals that would assist Alaska senior citizens and other Alaskans in obtaining affordable, accessible, secure and energy efficient senior housing. Toward the end of the session, the Legislature approved full funding for both the AHFC's feasibility grant program and an accessibility modification program. In addition, two senior developments were funded under the Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund, which requires the Legislature's approval each year. Those projects include New Stuyahok (on which a final determination will not be available until late 2002 or early 2003) and Cooper Landing.

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Food Safety and Sanitation

HB 532 would have discontinued the DEC's responsibility for conducting food safety and sanitation inspections wherever food is served around the state, including senior meal programs and senior centers. This bill failed, and funding for these inspections was preserved in the budget. However, the Legislature included intent language that calls for FY03 to be a transition year, after which local governments are expected to take over this function, so that there will be no funding for these activities in FY04. This would seriously affect senior meal programs throughout Alaska.

Department of Health and Social Services Medical Assistance

The Legislature approved full funding for Medical Assistance with intent language that no supplemental funds would be granted.

Looking Ahead: Priorities for the Next Legislative Session

The last Legislative Teleconference hosted by the Alaska Commission on Aging produced a list of priorities for the coming 23rd Legislative Session. Topics are identified by the bill number and title used in the last session. All of these failed to pass during the session and are now "dead." They will need to be reintroduced as new legislation in the new session in January 2003. Here's the list, in no particular order:

HB197: Health Care Services Directives. Legislators expressed concerns about some of the language in this bill. There will need to be some revision of the language of this bill to allow legislation with similar intent to move forward next session.

SB294 and HB417: Adult Day Licensing

HB483: Procurement of Group Health Insurance. Allowing individuals and small groups to buy into a benefits system at a reduced rate will greatly improve conditions for those serving Alaskan seniors and those with disabilities in small adult daycare centers and similar settings.

SB306: Prescription Drug Task Force

SB448: Telemarketers Phone Lists/Registration

HB393: Sales of Business Opportunities

SB342: Long-Term Care Ombudsman. Further explains and delineates the responsibilities and the authority of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman's office to insure that we have access to facilities within reasonable parameters and also speaks to some of the limitations of the volunteers.

SB182: Prorata Reductions to Benefit Programs. It's very likely this legislation will come back in future sessions. The Commission opposes this funding method (see Resolution 2002-07 above).

SB340: Hold Harmless Provisions of PFD Program. Senior advocates regard this as bad policy.

