

# Report Highlights

## Why DLA Performed This Audit

The audit was performed to determine if there is a continued need for the commission and if its termination date should be extended. The commission is set to sunset on June 30, 2024, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## What the Legislative Auditor Recommends

1. The commission's chair should ensure the annual analysis and evaluation report is complete and provided to the legislature and governor.

# A Sunset Review of the Department of Health, Alaska Commission on Aging (commission)

October 6, 2023

Audit Control Number 16-20135-24

## REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the audit concluded that the commission served the public's interest by helping older Alaskans lead dignified, independent, and useful lives through advocacy, outreach, and education. Furthermore, the commission fulfilled the federal requirement that each state establish a council to advise the state on aging matters, including developing and administering a state plan.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(4), the commission is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2024. We recommend the legislature extend the commission's termination date eight years, to June 30, 2032.

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# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## LEGISLATIVE BUDGET AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

### Division of Legislative Audit



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November 10, 2023

Members of the Legislative Budget  
and Audit Committee:

In accordance with the provisions of Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes (sunset legislation), we have reviewed the activities of the Alaska Commission on Aging and the attached report is submitted for your review.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING  
SUNSET REVIEW

October 6, 2023

Audit Control Number  
16-20135-24

The audit was conducted as required by AS 44.66.050(a). Per AS 44.66.010(a)(4), the commission is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2024. We recommend the legislature extend the commission's termination date to June 30, 2032.

The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Fieldwork procedures utilized in the course of developing the finding and recommendation presented in this report are discussed in the Objectives, Scope, and Methodology.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris Curtis".

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor

## ABBREVIATIONS

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AAC	Alaska Administrative Code
ACN	Audit Control Number
AMHTA	Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
AS	Alaska Statute
CISA	Certified Information Systems Auditor
commission	Alaska Commission on Aging
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPA	Certified Public Accountant
DLA	Division of Legislative Audit
DOH	Department of Health
DSDS	Division of Senior and Disabilities Services
FFY	Federal Fiscal Year
FY	Fiscal Year
OAA	Older Americans Act

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# ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION

## Alaska Commission on Aging

The Alaska Commission on Aging (commission) was established in 1981 as part of legislation intended to promote good health, honor, and dignity for people over the age of 60. The commission is organizationally located within the Department of Health (DOH) and comprised of 11 members: one senior service provider, seven public members appointed by the governor who serve overlapping four-year terms, two department commissioners or their designees, and the Alaska Pioneers' Home Advisory Board chair. At least six of the commission members must be 60 years of age or older, with at least two being 65 years of age or older. Commission members should be representative of low-income persons, minorities, and rural and urban areas. Additionally, appointments should secure statewide geographical representation on the commission. Commission members are listed in Exhibit 1.

The commission's governing statutes, AS 44.29.750–.795, outline its authority, purpose, and scope of work. The commission's primary functions include:

1. Approve a comprehensive statewide plan that identifies the concerns and needs of older Alaskans and, with reference to the approved plan, prepare and submit to the governor and

## Exhibit 1

### Alaska Commission on Aging Members as of August 17, 2023

Robert Sivertsen, Chair  
*Public Member - Ketchikan*

Janet Engan  
*Public Member - Wasilla*

Cynthia Lovel  
*Public Member - Wasilla*

Lisa Von Barga  
*Department of Commerce, Community,  
and Economic Development  
Commissioner Designee - Anchorage*

Paula Pawlowski  
*Public Member - Anchorage*

Robert Pawlowski  
*Pioneers' Home Advisory  
Board Member - Anchorage*

Nona Safra  
*Public Member - Anchor Point*

Pamela Samash  
*Public Member - Clear*

Darlene Supplee  
*Senior Service Provider - Fairbanks*

Vacant  
*Public Member*

Anthony Newman  
*Department of Health Designee*

Source: Office of the Governor, Boards and Commissions website.

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legislature an annual analysis and evaluation of services to older Alaskans.

2. Make recommendations directly to the governor and legislature with respect to legislation, regulations, and appropriations for programs or services that benefit older Alaskans.
3. Encourage the development of municipal commissions serving older Alaskans and community-oriented programs and services for the benefit of older Alaskans.
4. Employ an executive director who serves at the pleasure of the commission.
5. Help older Alaskans lead dignified, independent, and useful lives.
6. Request and receive reports and audits from State agencies and local institutions concerned with older Alaskans' conditions and needs.
7. Upon request, give assistance to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation senior housing office in administering the senior housing loan program and other senior housing related duties.
8. Provide recommendations concerning the integrated comprehensive mental health program for persons with mental health related illnesses to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority for its review and consideration. Also, provide recommendations regarding the use of monies in the mental health trust settlement income account.

The commission is required to conduct at least four meetings annually. These meetings include the presentation of reports from government and private organizations who serve older Alaskans. The commission has formed several committees to carry out its duties. The commission's standing committees include: executive,



planning, legislative advocacy, bylaws, outstanding older Alaskans' recognition, and nominating. Committee activities are reported during commission meetings.

As shown in Exhibit 2, FY 22 commission expenditures were \$323,052. Personal services is the largest expenditure component and includes the salary and benefits for two staff: an executive director and a planner position. The audit noted that, since the prior 2015 sunset audit, the commission's staff was reduced from four positions to two positions.

The commission is funded through interagency receipts from DOH's Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS) and

**Exhibit 2**

**Alaska Commission on Aging  
Schedule of Operating Expenditures and Funding Sources  
FY 20 through FY 23  
(Unaudited)**

	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23*
<b>Expenditures</b>				
Personal Services	\$200,965	\$242,765	\$285,569	\$213,490
Travel	22,983	9,821	10,947	28,243
Services	35,017	8,077	12,437	51,718
Commodities	704	2,948	14,099	4,486
Total Expenditures	<u>\$259,669</u>	<u>\$263,611</u>	<u>\$323,052</u>	<u>\$297,937</u>
<b>Funding Sources</b>				
Interagency Receipts from DSDS**	\$142,193	\$154,133	\$199,200	\$244,222
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority	117,476	109,478	123,852	53,715
Total Funding Sources	<u>\$259,669</u>	<u>\$263,611</u>	<u>\$323,052</u>	<u>\$297,937</u>

Source: State of Alaska accounting system.

\* Through July 31, 2023.

\*\* Interagency receipts are 75 percent federal funds and 25 percent general funds.

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mental health trust receipts. The interagency receipts were 75 percent federal funds and 25 percent general funds. The FY 24 budget is \$440,000.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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### Commission Required by Law

The federal government, through the Administration on Aging, provides funding to support services for individuals over the age of 60 as required by the Older Americans Act (OAA).<sup>1</sup> To be eligible to receive OAA funding, each state must designate a state agency to develop and administer a state plan for senior services. The State of Alaska has designated the Department of Health (DOH) as its “state unit on aging”.

The operations of Alaska’s state unit on aging are carried out jointly by DOH’s Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS) and the Alaska Commission on Aging (commission). DSDS administers state and federally funded grant programs. The commission is responsible for developing the state plan for senior services and performing advocacy and community outreach activities.

In accordance with OAA Section 305, a state may be divided into a number of planning and service areas or, as in the case of Alaska, be a single planning and service area. OAA Section 306(a)(6)(D) requires that the area agency on aging will:

*Establish an advisory council consisting of older individuals (including minority individuals and older individuals residing in rural areas) who are participants or who are eligible to participate in programs assisted under this Act, family caregivers of such individuals, representatives of older individuals, service providers, representatives of the business community, local elected officials, providers of veterans’ health care (if appropriate), and the general public, to advise continuously the area agency on aging on all matters relating to the development of the area plan, the administration of the plan and operations conducted under the plan.*

In Alaska the commission serves as the “advisory council”.

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<sup>1</sup> Funding is awarded in accordance with the OAA of 1965, as amended in 2020.

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The state plan for FFY 20–FFY 23 was approved in August 2019. The plan’s vision is “...to provide high-quality, culturally-sensitive, accessible services for Alaskans 60 and above to live healthy, independent, meaningful lives in the place and manner of their choosing.” The plan includes six goals:

1. Promote healthy aging and provide access to comprehensive and integrated health care.
2. Ensure seniors are financially secure.
3. Protect vulnerable seniors from abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation.
4. Ensure seniors have access to quality, affordable, accessible, safe, and appropriate housing, including senior housing, across the continuum of care.
5. Promote opportunities for meaningful aging, intergenerational connectivity, and civic engagement.
6. Provide quality and affordable home and community-based long-term support services to provide seniors with the highest quality of life.

At the time of the audit, the state plan for FFY 24–FFY 27 was pending final approval from the federal government.

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# REPORT CONCLUSIONS

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In developing conclusions regarding whether the Alaska Commission on Aging's (commission) termination date should be extended, its operations were evaluated using the 11 factors set out in AS 44.66.050(c), which are included as Appendix A to this report. Under the State's "sunset" law, these factors are to be considered in assessing whether an entity has demonstrated a public policy need for continued operations.

Overall, the audit concluded that the commission served the public's interest by helping older Alaskans lead dignified, independent, and useful lives through advocacy, outreach, and education. Furthermore, the commission fulfilled the federal requirement that each state establish a council to advise the state on aging matters, including developing and administering a state plan.

In accordance with AS 44.66.010(a)(4), the commission is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 2024. We recommend the legislature extend the commission's termination date eight years, to June 30, 2032.

Detailed report conclusions are as follows.

## **The commission conducted its meetings effectively.**

Commission meetings held from July 1, 2019, through January 31, 2023, were conducted in an effective manner. During the audit period, the commission held 14 quarterly meetings. A review of eight meetings found the meetings were appropriately public noticed, allotted time for public comments, and a quorum was consistently met.

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**The commission actively worked toward meeting objectives; however, the annual analysis and evaluation of services was incomplete.**

The commission actively worked toward attaining the following primary objectives:

- Prepare and approve a comprehensive statewide plan that identifies and addresses the concerns and needs of older Alaskans.
- Prepare an annual analysis and evaluation of the services provided to older Alaskans.
- Advocate for older Alaskans' needs.
- Make recommendations to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) regarding programs and use of funds.

The commission prepared the FFY 20–FFY 23 State Plan for Senior Services, which was approved by the Department of Health and Social Services, the governor, and the Administration on Aging. In addition, at the time of the audit, the FFY 24–FFY 27 State Plan for Senior Services had been submitted and was pending final approval from the federal government. To develop the plan, the commission administered a survey in 2022 to gather information on senior needs, with 5,943 seniors responding to the survey. In addition, the commission surveyed 90 service providers about senior needs.

As required by AS 44.29.790(a)(1), the commission prepared an annual analysis and evaluation of services provided to older Alaskans. The report process involved compiling statistics regarding seniors into a “Senior Snapshot” report, which included extensive statistical information on matters such as senior population growth, senior housing, senior benefits by region, senior safety, and senior health, but no evaluation of the services was included. Additionally, auditors were unable to find evidence that the annual report was submitted to the governor as required by statute. (See Recommendation 1)

According to the commission’s executive director, during the audit period the commission advocated for older Alaskans by monitoring legislation and providing testimony and letters of support when

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warranted. In addition, during 2021 the commission advocated for seniors to be prioritized for the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccination. During 2022, the commission advocated for senior grant funding.

As required by AS 44.29.790(a)(8), the commission regularly presented at AMHTA board meetings regarding the needs of older Alaskans. The commission also participated in the completion of Alaska’s Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program Plan 2020–2024 as one of AMHTA’s partner advisory boards.

Finally, the commission advocated for older Alaskans by holding meetings throughout the state. For example, quarterly commission meetings held in Soldotna and Fairbanks included site visits to various senior centers and smaller communities, where listening sessions were held. At these listening sessions, questions asked included:

- What are some positive things that happened this past year?
- What are some challenges you, your friends, and family have experienced?
- What resources and assistance did you receive? How was it helpful?
- What additional assistance would have been helpful?
- What areas should be the focus over the next five years?

**The commission generally met objectives, although vacancies and turnover negatively impacted operations.**

From July 2019 until January 2023 the commission had four executive directors. There were no service gaps during transition between executive directors because the commission’s planner position served as the acting executive director. During the same time period, the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services’ rural outreach coordinator position that assisted the commission with fulfilling its duties had two vacancies with service gaps of 14 months and seven months respectively. According to the commission chair,

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the hiring of an executive director took priority over filling the rural outreach coordinator position, which contributed to the extended vacancies.

The commission's loss of institutional knowledge and turnover, along with COVID-19 related disruptions, contributed to a slowdown in the commission's activities. As a result, the commission's executive director stated that there were challenges in maintaining the quality and consistency of work, diminished coordination of commission meetings, delayed decision making, and hampered communication. Despite these challenges, the commission continued to provide its core services.

**Commission advocacy efforts duplicate other organizations, but are required by the Older Americans Act.**

The commission's advocacy efforts duplicate other organizations that share common goals, such as the American Association of Retired Persons and the Alaska Geriatric Exchange Network. Shared advocacy goals include availability of senior housing and in-home services. Although the commission's advocacy efforts are duplicated by other organizations, as the State's planning and service area agency the commission is required by the Older Americans Act (OAA) to advocate on behalf of older Alaskans. Further, OAA advocacy requirements include making recommendations regarding budgets and policies affecting older Alaskans, which are unique objectives of the commission.



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# FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

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The prior 2015 sunset audit made two recommendations:

- The Alaska Commission on Aging’s (commission) executive director should implement and follow procedures to public notice all commission meetings. Procedures should include public noticing commission committee meetings.
- The commission’s chairperson should review and approve the legislation watch list prior to distribution.

The prior audit recommendation to implement and follow procedures to public notice all commission meetings has been resolved. The audit reviewed eight meetings held during the audit period and found all eight were properly public noticed.

The prior audit recommendation to review and approve the legislation watch list prior to distribution has been resolved. Auditors reviewed watch lists created during the audit period and found the lists included bills that were relevant to older Alaskans. The commission chair reviewed the watch lists prior to distribution to confirm the bills were related to the commission’s activities.

This audit makes one new recommendation.

## **Recommendation 1:**

**The commission’s chair should ensure the annual analysis and evaluation report is complete and provided to the legislature and governor.**

An evaluation of services provided to older Alaskans was not part of the commission’s annual report. Further, the commission’s executive director was unable to confirm that the annual report was provided to the governor.

Alaska Statute 44.29.790(a)(1) requires the commission to prepare an annual analysis and evaluation of services provided to older Alaskans, and submit it to the legislature and governor. During the audit period, statistics regarding seniors were compiled into an annual “Senior Snapshot” report, which included extensive statistical information on matters such as senior population growth in Alaska, senior housing, poverty rates, senior safety, and senior

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health. However, the Snapshot did not contain an evaluation of services provided to older Alaskans. As a result, the legislature and governor were not informed whether services provided to older Alaskans were effective.

According to the commission's executive director, from July 1, 2019, to January 31, 2023, the commission had four different executive directors. A complete report was not generated due to competing priorities and a loss of institutional knowledge.

We recommend the commission chair ensure that the commission's annual analysis and evaluation report is complete and is provided to the legislature and governor.

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# OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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In accordance with Title 24 and Title 44 of the Alaska Statutes, we have reviewed the activities of the Alaska Commission on Aging (commission) to determine if there is a demonstrated public need for its continued existence.

As required by AS 44.66.050(a), this report shall be considered by the committee of reference during the legislative oversight process in determining whether the commission should be reestablished. Under AS 44.66.010(a)(4), the commission will terminate on June 30, 2024, and will have one year from that date to conclude its administrative operations.

## Objectives

The three central, interrelated objectives of our audit are:

1. To determine if the commission's termination date should be extended.
2. To determine if the commission is operating in the public's interest.
3. To determine the status of recommendations made in the prior sunset audit.

## Scope

The assessment of commission operations and performance was based on criteria set out in AS 44.66.050(c). Criteria set out in this statute relates to the determination of a demonstrated public need for the commission. We reviewed the commission's activities from July 1, 2019 through January 31, 2023. Financial information is presented, unaudited, from FY 20 through FY 23.

## Methodology

During the course of our audit, we reviewed and evaluated the following:

- The prior sunset audit report (ACN 06-20090-15) to identify issues affecting the commission and to identify prior sunset audit recommendations.

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- Applicable statutes and regulations to identify commission functions and responsibilities, determine whether statutory or regulatory changes enhanced or impeded commission activities, and help ascertain if the commission operated in the public interest.
  - Commission meeting minutes and annual reports to gain an understanding of commission proceedings and activities, the nature and extent of public input, whether a quorum was maintained, and whether commission vacancies impeded operations.
  - The State's Online Public Notices system to verify commission meetings were adequately public noticed.
  - Expenditures and revenues for the commission to gain an understanding of the commission's operations.
  - Various Alaska news websites, as well as contacting the Alaska State Ombudsman, to identify duplication of commission activities, complaints against the commission, and other commission related concerns.
  - Various websites containing information for potential duplication of commission activities.
  - The FFY 20–FFY 23 State Plan for Senior Services to verify compliance with statutory requirements.

To identify and evaluate commission activities, we conducted interviews with State agency staff and the commission chair. Specific areas of inquiry included commission operations, statutory duties, regulations, duplication of efforts, and complaints against the commission.

The audit utilized the following sample:

- A judgmental sample of eight of 14 quarterly commission meetings held from July 1, 2019 to January 31, 2023, was reviewed to gain an understanding of commission proceedings and activities, the nature

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and extent of public input, whether a quorum was maintained, whether the meetings were public noticed, and whether commission vacancies impeded operations. Test results were not projected to the population.

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# APPENDIX SUMMARY

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Appendix A provides the sunset criteria used in developing the conclusion regarding whether the Alaska Commission on Aging's termination date should be extended.

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## APPENDIX A

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### **Analysis of Public Need Criteria AS 44.66.050(c)**

A determination as to whether a board or commission has demonstrated a public need for its continued existence must take into consideration the following factors:

1. the extent to which the board or commission has operated in the public interest;
2. the extent to which the operation of the board or commission has been impeded or enhanced by existing statutes, procedures, and practices that it has adopted, and any other matter, including budgetary, resource, and personnel matters;
3. the extent to which the board or commission has recommended statutory changes that are generally of benefit to the public interest;
4. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged interested persons to report to it concerning the effect of its regulations and decisions on the effectiveness of service, economy of service, and availability of service that it has provided;
5. the extent to which the board or commission has encouraged public participation in the making of its regulations and decisions;
6. the efficiency with which public inquiries or complaints regarding the activities of the board or commission filed with it, with the department to which a board or commission is administratively assigned, or with the office of victims' rights or the office of the ombudsman have been processed and resolved;
7. the extent to which a board or commission that regulates entry into an occupation or profession has presented qualified applicants to serve the public;

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## APPENDIX A (Continued)

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8. the extent to which state personnel practices, including affirmative action requirements, have been complied with by the board or commission in its own activities and in the area of activity or interest;
9. the extent to which statutory, regulatory, budgetary, or other changes are necessary to enable the board or commission to better serve the interests of the public and to comply with the factors enumerated in this subsection;
10. the extent to which the board or commission has effectively attained its objectives and purposes and the efficiency with which the board or commission has operated; and
11. the extent to which the board or commission duplicates the activities of another governmental agency or the private sector.

# Agency Response from the Department of Health



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

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JAN 02 2024

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

December 29, 2023

Kris Curtis, CPA, CISA  
Legislative Auditor  
Division of Legislative Audit  
P.O. Box 113300  
Juneau, AK 99811-3300

RE: Confidential Preliminary Audit Report, Department of Health (DOH), Alaska Commission on Aging (commission) Sunset Review

Dear Ms. Curtis,

The Department of Health (DOH) and the commission appreciates the recommendation that the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) be extended to June 30, 2032. Below are the responses for the conclusion and recommendation included in the preliminary audit report dated December 13, 2023.

### Conclusions

DOH agrees with the conclusions. Page eight of the preliminary audit references "...at the time of the audit, the FFY 24 – FFY 27 *State Plan for Senior Services* had been submitted and was pending final approval from the federal government." We would like to notify you that approval has since been received from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living. The commission has made the approved plan available electronically and physically.

### Recommendation No. 1

The commission's chair should ensure the annual analysis and evaluation report is complete and provided to the legislature and governor.

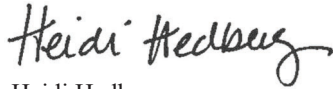
DOH concurs with the recommendation. The commission is committed to providing a complete annual analysis and evaluation report to the legislature and governor. The State Senior Plan was updated and approved in 2023 and provides needed information and evaluation of services provided to Older Alaskans. Along with this year's Senior Snapshot, the commission will develop a moment-in-time benchmark, both of which will be provided to the legislature and governor. Recognizing the need to expand measurable goals and objectives, the commission is working with state and other partners to review and gauge the achievements and/or shortcomings of listed goals and objectives, which will also be incorporated into the annual report. The commission has started developing the resources necessary to ensure timely report preparation and submission. Updates will be made to the commission's policy and procedure manual to ensure continuity by current and new board members.

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Thank you for providing the opportunity to address this outstanding issue and to provide additional insight into it. Please contact Terra Serpette at 907-465-6333 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Heidi Hedberg  
Commissioner

CC: Josephine Stern, DOH Assistant Commissioner  
Emily Ricci, DOH Deputy Commissioner  
Robert Sivertsen, Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)  
Jon Haghayeghi, ACoA Executive Director  
Terra Serpette, DOH Audit Manager



# Agency Response from the Alaska Commission on Aging



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR MICHAEL J. DUNLEAVY

Department of Health  
ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING

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DEC 19 2023

December 18, 2023

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT

Dear Kris Curtis,

I am writing in response to the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee's confidential preliminary audit report on the Department of Health, Alaska Commission on Aging dated October 6, 2023, and received on December 13, 2023.

The Alaska Commission on Aging acknowledges the audit's findings and is committed to addressing the recommendations. We concur with the objective of ensuring that our annual analysis and evaluation report is comprehensive, and we are actively working towards this goal. In line with Recommendation I, we are implementing measures to enhance the completeness of our annual reporting and ensure its timely provision to the legislature and governor.

We will continue to data and statistics presented in the "Senior Snapshot" report. Furthermore, we are taking steps to preserve institutional knowledge despite changes in executive leadership, which will aid in maintaining continuity and effectiveness in our operations.

To this end, we have set forth a plan with clear timelines for the implementation of the necessary changes and will provide a detailed update on our progress in the next reporting period. We are confident that these efforts will not only address the concerns raised in the audit but will also strengthen the Commission's capacity to serve the public interest.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to respond and is looking forward to the final review and approval by the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee.

Sincerely,

*Bob Sivertsen*

Bob Sivertsen  
Chair  
Alaska Commission on Aging