



**Alaska State Legislature - Twenty-Fifth Legislature**

**A Report on Bills and Resolutions Relevant to  
Anti-Hunger Organizations**

**Kerri Burrows  
Alaska Food Coalition Program Manager**

**June 2008**

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Legislative Action .....	4
Clients .....	4
Charitable Organizations.....	9
General Interest.....	10
Conclusion .....	12

## **Introduction**

The work of the Alaska State Legislature is critical to the elimination of hunger in our state. The decisions made by legislators in Juneau directly affect the hungry and the anti-hunger network of Alaska. For that reason, staffs of anti-hunger agencies, advocates and clients of food assistance programs need to keep up with legislation being discussed by elected officials.

This report supplies the anti-hunger network with the information from the Twenty-Fifth Alaska State Legislature it requires to achieve both of these tasks.

The report assesses and categorizes bills and resolutions accessed through the Alaska State Legislature Bills Action and Status Inquiry System (BASIS) webpage (<http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/>). Some of the selected bills were passed and are now law, but not all. Most of the bills we are tracking affect client income, which should have an impact on food insecurity and the need for food assistance. In addition to the client-centered bills, several anti-hunger agencies received funding through the capital appropriations bill.

Four future actions are suggested in order for The Alaska Food Coalition to continue informational work on legislation. These are:

1. Further track the identified bills, especially ones highlighted for special notice. The results of this tracking could be formally presented in bi-annual reports, which would also include new bills in future legislatures.
2. If a bill draws a degree of concern, the Alaska Food Coalition Manager will inform members of the Policy Committee and the Alaska Food Coalition President so that they can decide a course of action. Recommended action could include an action alert to members, asking members to engage in letter writing, public comment/hearings, calls to/meetings with legislators and opinion makers or testimonies.
3. Create a legislative agenda for the coalition that creates not just anti-hunger specific legislation, but also supports legislation that has an indirect effect on the network.
4. Share anti-hunger information with a wider audience through the Food Bank of Alaska's Advocacy Network and any other related coalitions.

## Legislative Action

What follows is a list of bills and resolutions organized into three broad groups (clients, charitable organizations and general interest) and then into subject areas. The links provided for each bill provide detailed information about its progress through the Alaska State Legislature.

### Clients

**BILL:** HB3/SB 215

**SHORT TITLE:** REQUIREMENTS FOR DRIVERS LICENSE/ID

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB215](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB215)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB3](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB3)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** Both HB 3, introduced during the first session, and SB 215, introduced during the second session, address the issuance of identification cards and driver's licenses. Both bills state that people who are obtaining their first ID or have allowed their current one to expire must show proof of citizenship or legal status in the United States.

**IMPACT:** While these bills do not have a direct impact on anti-hunger agencies, they do make it harder for pantry clients who are recent or undocumented immigrants to obtain services for themselves and their children, who in many cases are U.S. citizens.

**STATUS:** Neither HB 3 or SB 215 passed. Alternately, SB 202 did pass, adding to the general tone of disagreement with the purpose of HB 3/SB 215. SB 202 bars state agencies from spending funds solely for the purpose of implementing or aiding in the implementation of the requirements of the federal Real ID Act of 2005. The act is now federal law and imposes certain security, authentication and issuance procedures standards for the state driver's licenses and state ID cards, in order for them to be accepted by the federal government for "official purposes", as defined by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

**BILL:** HB 366

**SHORT TITLE:** PFD: EXECUTION/DISCLOSURE OF APPROPS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB366](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB366)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From Sponsor Statement)* "Approximately 5,000 Alaskan children do not receive child support because their non-custodial parent is incarcerated and ineligible to receive a Permanent Fund Dividend...Under current law, the Permanent Fund Dividends of individuals found ineligible under AS 43.23.005(d) are appropriated to the Department of Corrections and to programs for the victims of crimes. HB 366 will allow the Department of Revenue to provide grants to minor children of incarcerated individuals."

**IMPACT:** For the affected children, this bill will allow their guardians to receive the child support they deserve. In turn, the more money available to take care of these children, the less they are dependent on the social service system to meet their basic needs and ultimately, they will be less hungry and/or food insecure.

**STATUS:** HB 366 passed and was signed into law on June 10, 2008 and will take effect January 1, 2009.

**BILL:** SB 231

**SHORT TITLE:** LOW INCOME HOUSING; HOMELESSNESS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB231](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB231)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** This bill, introduced in the second session by request of the Governor, expands the power of the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to address homelessness

**IMPACT:** Homelessness and hunger go hand-in-hand. Any efforts toward ending homelessness will also have a direct impact on ending hunger.

**STATUS:** SB 231 passed and was signed into law on June 4, 2008 and will be effective on July 1, 2008.

**BILL:** HB 42

**SHORT TITLE:** ALASKA MINIMUM WAGE

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB42](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB42)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From Sponsors Statement)* "Alaska's minimum wage has not been increased since 2002, when it rose to \$7.15/hr. Since that time, fuel and other living costs have increased significantly, and other states have increased their minimum wages above Alaska's....On an annual basis, the current minimum wage pays a full time employee \$14,000/year. HB raises [Alaska's] minimum wage to \$8.00/hr, which is what the current wage would be if adjusted for inflation since 2002. It also provides that the wage should be adjusted annually for cost of living increases...Finally, the bill re-instates a provision that used to be in Alaska law, providing that Alaska's minimum wage should, at a minimum, be at least \$1.00/hr above the federal minimum wage."

**IMPACT:** Approximately 14,000 Alaskans currently make less than \$8/hr. This is a meager wage for one person, much less a family. Any increase in the minimum wage would greatly affect a person's dependence on the anti-hunger network.

**STATUS:** The bill, introduced in the first session by Rep. Les Gara, never made it out of the Labor and Commerce Committee. It was not reintroduced in the second session.

**BILL:** HB 242/SB 160

**SHORT TITLE:** MANDATORY UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB242](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB242)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=sb+160](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=sb+160)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From the Sponsor Statement)* “... [F]amily health insurance premiums have risen 4.6 times faster than the median earnings of Alaskans over the past 6 years... This bill establishes a framework mandating and ensuring affordable health coverage for all Alaskans. A board of 11 stakeholders will oversee the plan, making certain that residents are able to choose and purchase coverage that provides adequate care.

**IMPACT:** We learned in the 2005 Hunger Study that 32 percent of clients served by pantries in Alaska have had to choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care. Knowing this, the passage of a universal health care bill has the potential to reduce the dependence clients have on the anti-hunger network.

**STATUS:** While neither of the bills passed, SB 160 did garner serious attention in the legislature, the media, and the public, making it all the way to the Senate Finance Committee. There is a good possibility we might see this bill or something similar again.

**BILL:** SB 87/HB 140/HB 231/SJR 1/SB 27

**SHORT TITLE:** MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ELIGIBILITY (Denali Kid Care)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB87](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB87)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB140](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB140)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB231](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB231)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SJR1](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SJR1)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB27](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB27)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From the Sponsor Statement)* “The intent of SB 27 is to make health insurance accessible to all children, pregnant women, and other Medicaid qualified individuals in medical or intermediate care facilities... As an “enhanced” reimbursement program, the federal government pays 70% of the Denali KidCare Program or about \$840 million out of \$1.2 billion. Denali KidCare served an estimated 7,600 children as of December, 2006... Eligibility rates in Alaska have been frozen at 2003 federal Poverty Levels (FPL). Under SB 27, eligibility for persons under 19 years of age increases to 200% of the FPL and requires others who qualify and can afford it to make contributions toward their coverage.”

**IMPACT:** As noted in discussion about universal health care, many Alaskans have to choose between medical needs and food. The current regulations for Denali Kid Care leave out many families who are unlikely to be able to afford private health insurance. A boost in the eligibility rates could give them the support they need to live healthier lives.

**STATUS:** Several bills were brought forth, but only one passed – SB 27, and it raised the eligibility threshold only to 175% of the poverty line instead of 200%. Advocates for

child health care will continue to argue for the increase in eligibility rates in the coming years.

**BILL:** SB 179

**SHORT TITLE:** DEPENDENT HEALTH INSURANCE; AGE LIMIT

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB179](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB179)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From the Sponsor statement)* "SB 179 mandates family private health insurance coverage for dependent children through age 25. It prohibits a health care insurer from denying or removing enrollment or eliminating coverage under age 26.

**IMPACT:** *(From the Sponsor Statement)* "Insurance coverage is important for this generally healthy group of young adults who should be encouraged to start taking responsibility for their own health care. It has been found that 14% of adults 18-29 are obese, an increase of 70% in the 1990s, - the fastest rate of increase among all adults. There are 3.5 million pregnancies each year among the 21 million women ages 19-29. One-third of all diagnoses of HIV are made among young adults. Emergency room visits are far more common among young adults than children or older adults. Most young adults have no regular doctor, no link to the health care system, and more than one-third of those who do require medical attention are often saddled with debt and collection agencies."

**STATUS:** This bill was instead referred to the Committee on Health, Education and Social Services but did not pass out of committee.

**BILL:** HB 308

**SHORT TITLE:** HEATING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB308](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB308)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** HB 308 establishes a state heating assistance program in addition to the federal heating assistance program.

**IMPACT:** As with medical care, more than 30 percent of Alaskans have had to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel. Any assistance in addressing the ever-increasing cost of utilities in Alaska is welcome relief.

**STATUS:** Like SB 179, this bill was referred to the Health, Education and Social Services committee but was not passed on to the full legislature.

**BILL:** HB 59

**SHORT TITLE:** UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION BENEFITS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB59](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB59)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** HB 59 will use Alaska's average weekly earnings to calculate future unemployment benefits. The proposal will bring the weekly wage replacement to an average of 49%. Currently, the percent is the second lowest in the nation at 33%.

**IMPACT:** *(From Sponsor's Statement)* "Alaska's current unemployment insurance benefits fall short in helping families cover living expenses during periods of unemployment. Alaska's maximum weekly unemployment insurance benefit of \$248 is the fourth lowest in the nation and has not been adjusted since 1996. Increasing the maximum weekly benefit is essential in alleviating skill shortages by ensuring Alaskan workers and their families survive periods of unemployment and will lessen the burden of anti-hunger agencies who are trying to assist them."

**STATUS:** Unfortunately, this bill didn't get much attention from legislators and therefore did not make it very far in the legislative process. It never made it out of the first session with the Labor & Commerce Committee.

**BILL:** SB 4/SB 74/SB 40/HB 79/HB 11/HB198/SB 204/HB 148/HB 1001/SB 256/SJR 3/SB 90

**SHORT TITLE:** SENIOR BENEFITS PAYMENT PROGRAM

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?bill=SB%20%20%204&session=25](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?bill=SB%20%20%204&session=25)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB148](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB148)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB198](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB198)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB4](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB4)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB1001](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB1001)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB256](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB256)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SJR3](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SJR3)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB90](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB90)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB74](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB74)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB40](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB40)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB79](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB79)

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB11](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB11)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From the Sponsor Statement for HB 198)* "HB 198 establishes the Alaska Senior Assistance Program to provide cash assistance payments to low-income



Alaska seniors.

“The existing Senior Care Program is amended to remove the little used prescription drug benefits and increase monthly cash payments to Alaskans, age 65 and older, based on their incomes related to federal poverty level guidelines adjusted for Alaska (FPL-A). Monthly payments are:

- \$250 per month to individuals with income less than 75% of FPL-A
- \$175 per month to individuals with income from 75% to less than 100% of FPL-A
- \$125 per month to individuals with income from 100% to less than \$135% of FPL-A

The Alaska Senior Assistance Program combines desirable features of both the Longevity Bonus and Senior Care programs into a single needs based structure that delivers real help to low-income seniors across Alaska. Program enrollment is open to all qualifying seniors.

The new Alaska Senior Assistance Program sunsets June 30, 2011 if not reauthorized.”

**IMPACT:** Seniors make up 14 percent of the clients at food pantries, kitchens and shelters in Alaska. Senior Benefits provides a significant amount of cash assistance to low-income seniors. More income for seniors results in less food insecurity and reliance on the emergency food system.

**STATUS:** After a special session called by the governor, the Senior Care Benefits program was finally passed. The agreed upon amounts were:

- \$250 if the individual's household income does not exceed 75 percent of the federal poverty line for Alaska;
- \$175 if the individual's household income does not exceed 100 percent but is above 75 percent of the federal poverty line for Alaska;
- \$125 if the individual's household income does not exceed 175 percent but is above 100 percent of the federal poverty line for Alaska.

The benefits program took effect immediately in July 07 and was extended through the passage of SB 256 in the second session in April 08.

### **Charitable Organizations**

**BILL:** SB 22

**SHORT TITLE:** SALE OR DONATION OF FOOD ITEMS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=sb22](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=sb22)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** This bill primarily affects fundraising/”bake sales” and would make it easier for organizations to avoid liability home-canned or home-baked items. This bill puts the liability on the maker of the food when the item is sold at the bake sale or other commercial event.

**IMPACT:** This bill would make it easier for organizations to have bake sales as fundraisers and would eliminate an organization's liability for food-borne illness.

**STATUS:** This bill was instead referred to Health, Education and Social Services but did not pass the legislature.

**BILL:** HB 166

**SHORT TITLE:** PERM. FUND DIV.: CONTRIBUTION/EXECUTIONS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB166](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=HB166)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** *(From the Sponsor Statement)* "HB 166 is an attempt to increase private philanthropy in Alaska by giving people the option of donating a portion of their Permanent Fund Dividend check to their favorite charity."

**IMPACT:** HB 166 allows for a list of approved organizations to be included with a person's PFD application and allows them to check off which charities that they would like to donate to. One hundred percent of their donation will go to the charity. This simple process will make giving to anti-hunger agencies easier.

**STATUS:** HB 166 passed and was made effective May 28, 2008.

**BILL:** HB 396

**SHORT TITLE:** INCREASE 2008 PERM. FUND DIVIDEND

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=hb+396&submit=Display+Bill](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=hb+396&submit=Display+Bill)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** This bill would increase the 2008 PFD by \$500 to address the increasing cost of energy.

**IMPACT:** Again, more cash in the hands of those who struggle against poverty means more disposable income for food and less dependence on the anti-hunger network for assistance.

**STATUS:** While created with good intentions, this bill met lots of opposition in the legislative process. It did not get past the Finance Committee.

### **General Interest**

**BILL:** SB 256

**SHORT TITLE:** SUPPLEMENTAL/CAPITAL APPROPRIATIONS

[http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get\\_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB256](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=25&bill=SB256)

**BILL OVERVIEW:** This bill gives supplemental monies to various projects and organizations in the state. Several anti-hunger agencies received funding through this bill. Below is a list of anti-hunger organizations that applied and whether or not their funding was approved.

**IMPACT:** These organizations have taken the step to contact their legislators about what is going on in their community and how the state can help them reach their mission. Not everyone got what they wanted, but a fair amount of organizations will see a large financial boost from the state this year.

**STATUS:**

Catholic Community Services - Angoon Senior Center - Stove, Refrigerator - (\$20,000)

**VETOED**

Kenai Peninsula Food Bank - Building Improvements and Maintenance - (\$22,500)

**PASSED**

Willow Area Seniors, Inc.- Bring Power to Willow Area Senior Campus - (\$100,000)

**PASSED**

Alaska Addiction Rehabilitation Services, Inc. - Nugen's Ranch - Replacement Facility - (\$100,000) **VETOED**

Alpha Omega Life Care, Inc. - Delivery Van and Moveable Building - (\$20,000)

**VETOED**

Anchorage Senior Center - Study of Future Needs - (\$150,000) **VETOED**

Armed Services YMCA - On-Base Public Transportation - (\$70,000)

**REDUCED AMOUNT**

Boys and Girls Club, Woodland Park Clubhouse - Commercial Grade Kitchen Renovation - (\$78,000)

**PASSED**

Covenant House Alaska - Covenant House Facility Expansion - \$4,000,000

**REDUCED AMOUNT**

Fairbanks Community Food Bank - Computer Upgrade, Utility Assistance and Refrigeration Improvement - \$50,000 **REDUCED AMOUNT**

Food Bank of Alaska - \$5,000 Latino Lions Club Food Distribution **PASSED**  
\$5,000 Free Methodist Church Food Distribution **PASSED**

Juneau Cooperative Christian Ministry – Glory Hole Dormitory Upgrades - \$75,000  
**REDUCED AMOUNT**

Juneau Youth Services - Vehicle Purchase - \$25,000 **VETOED**

Mid-Valley Senior Center, Inc. – Kitchen Renovation/Upgrades - \$100,000  
**PASSED**

Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Inc. - New Senior Center Construction - \$3,200,000  
**PASSED**

Valdez Senior Citizens Center, Inc. – Kitchen Renovations and Repairs 21- \$47,000  
**PASSED**

Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc.- Wasilla Senior Center Upgrades and Improvements-  
\$800,000 **PASSED**

### Conclusion

In this survey of bills and resolutions relevant to the hunger issue from the Twenty-Fifth Alaska State Legislature, there were more bills affecting clients than charitable organizations and general interest bills.

While none of the bills and resolutions of the Twenty-Fifth Alaska State Legislature directly address the hunger issue, those bills and resolutions selected were chosen because of their wider effect on hungry people or anti-hunger agencies. From the bills and resolutions identified, the report recommends 3 issues be flagged for special attention:

1. Mandatory Universal Health Care
2. Denali KidCare
3. Increase Permanent Fund Dividend/Energy Assistance

Bills were introduced unsuccessfully in all three of these categories. In the case of Denali KidCare, the bill passed but under with a lower eligibility threshold than what the bill sponsor initially proposed. These bills, all client centered, have the ability to make a large impact on food security in Alaska and the burden of anti-hunger networks. Alaskans with better, more reliable health care and more cash flow to help with ever increasing energy costs are less likely to experience food insecurity and have to resort to accessing emergency food.

For future action, the analysis suggests that the Alaska Food Coalition:

1. Further track the identified bills, especially ones highlighted for special notice. The results of this tracking could be formally presented in bi-annual reports, which would also include new bills in future legislatures.
2. If a bill draws a degree of concern, the Alaska Food Coalition Manager will inform members of the Policy Committee and the Alaska Food Coalition President so that they can decide a course of action. Recommended action could include an

- action alert to members, asking members to engage in letter writing, public comment/hearings, calls to/meetings with legislators and opinion makers or testimonies.
3. Create a legislative agenda for the coalition that creates not just anti-hunger specific legislation, but also supports legislation that has an indirect effect on the network.
  4. Share anti-hunger information with a wider audience through the Food Bank of Alaska's Advocacy Network and any other related coalitions.