

THE ALASKA FOOD COALITION



A Report on the State of Alaska's Boards & Commissions

Henryk Szadziewski

Alaska Food Coalition Program Coordinator

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Executive Summary

This report was prompted by the Executive Committee of The Alaska Food Coalition. The committee wanted to explore the possibilities of introducing the hunger issue to the system of Boards and Commissions in the State of Alaska. Research was undertaken to explore the possibility of attaching the hunger issue to an existing board or commission. The report discovered that due to the specific focus of each board or commission and the wide-range of people affected by hunger, a separate Hunger Commission was the most desirable outcome. In addition, a Hunger Commission would be a huge step in eradicating the hunger problem in Alaska by increasing awareness of the physical capacity needs of anti-hunger agencies so that food gets to hungry people. This finding does not preclude other options of lesser desirability such as a Basic Needs Commission, which would work on basic economic and social rights, or the attachment of the hunger issue to the most viable existing board or commission, which according to this report could either be the Alaska Children's Trust Board or the Alaska Commission on Aging.

Need for the Report

According to The Hunger in America 2006 Alaska Report, 83,174 Alaskans access food from the network of charitable anti-hunger agencies in the state. The report also records that agencies all across the state face challenges such as funding, lack of food or volunteers or staff while trying to meet increasing emergency food assistance needs in their community. This increase in demand by clients coupled with the strain on the physical capacity of anti-hunger agencies prompted The Alaska Food Coalition initiate a project to expand physical capacity in the charitable food distribution network.

Since its inception, The Alaska Food Coalition has been able to develop productive relationships between the various state and non-profit anti-hunger agencies in Alaska. It is with this experience in mind, added to the alarming growth of hungry people in Alaska and the necessity to expand the overstretched charitable food distribution network, that members explored the possibility of a State of Alaska Commission on Hunger. The commission would bring to public and legislative attention hunger in Alaska and may lead to the procurement of additional funding for anti-hunger agencies.

The idea was discussed at the Annual Member Meeting in Juneau in April 2006 with Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner, Karleen Jackson. Outcomes of that discussion were further examined by The Alaska Food Coalition Executive Committee in a meeting on May 16, 2006. The committee felt that attaching the issue of hunger to an existing board or commission was a more realistic goal than setting up an entirely new body. It was decided that the Program Coordinator would look into possible intersections and present the results in a report.

Explanation of Methodology

Boards and Commissions of the State of Alaska were researched by accessing this link: <http://gov.state.ak.us/boards/>. From a list of 120, active state boards and commissions which were deemed to have possible intersections with the hunger issue were selected. 14 were chosen on the strength of their name alone and researched. Each chosen board or commission was analyzed in the following areas:

1. Board/Commission profile
2. Possible intersections/comments
3. Score out of 10 (1 being the lowest possibility of association and 10 the highest)

The board/commission profile was taken from either mission or purpose statements provided from board and commission websites. The possible intersections/comments section describes how each board or commission is relevant to raising awareness of the hunger issue or is useful as a funding source. The score out of 10 reflects the overall suitability of the board or commission in regard to the criteria as set out in the possible intersections.

Each board and commission is dealt with in turn below using the three criteria outlined above.

Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

Website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/abada/>

Board/Commission profile:

“In partnership with the public, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse plans and advocates for policies, programs and services that help Alaskans achieve healthy and productive lives, free from the devastating effects of the abuse of alcohol and other substances.”

Possible intersections/comments:

Two of the boards guiding principles set out possible intersections; one on health the other on partnerships:

“Success will be measured by improvement in health and well-being and by the elimination of substance abuse and the harm it causes.”

“Partnerships between communities, public and private organizations, families and individuals are the key to success in fulfilling our mission.”

The hazard of this utilizing this board is the linking of substance abuse and all hungry people in Alaska.

Score out of 10: 4

Agriculture and Conservation Board

Website: http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/ag/ag_arlf.htm

Board/Commission profile:

Duties of the board are to “authorize the disposal of agricultural land acquired by the agricultural revolving loan fund; approve and administer agricultural loans; adopt

regulations; consult with the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources about the classification and disposal of agricultural lands; and submit recommendations for the appointment of a director of agriculture to the Commissioner.”

Possible intersections/comments:

This board primarily administers agricultural loans. No possible intersections.

Score out of 10: 0

Alaska Children's Trust Board

Website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/childrenstrust/>

Board/Commission profile:

“The Alaska Children’s Trust was established in 1988 with the goal of preventing child abuse and neglect throughout the state. It was established as a separate endowment trust of the state. The principal of the trust consists of legislative appropriations to the trust, gifts, bequests, and contributions of cash or other assets from a person.

The Children’s Trust operates as a savings account. The Fund’s principal continues to grow through grants and donations, while the interest from the earnings fund small grants to small nonprofits providing prevention programs for child abuse and neglect.

Currently the Alaska Children’s Trust totals over \$10 million. In FY2006 over \$290,000 in grants were awarded to 8 programs in communities across the state.”

Possible intersections/comments:

There are definite intersections between the hunger issue and the commission’s purpose of preventing child neglect. The Hunger in America 2006 Alaska Report found that nearly 24,000 children were either hungry or food insecure. However, the board’s mandate is a select, albeit sympathetic, demographic.

Score out of 10: 7

Alaska Commission on Aging

Website: <http://www.alaskaaging.org/>

Board/Commission profile:

“The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) advocates for state policy, public and private partnerships, state/federal projects and citizen involvement that assists each of us to age successfully in our homes, in our communities or as near as possible to our communities and families. Our work involves planning, advocacy, and interagency collaboration on issues and state and federal services affecting older Alaskans.”

Possible intersections/comments:

One of the Alaska Commission on Aging guiding principles; “Seniors will live with dignity and respect and have an opportunity to receive services to promote and enhance their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health” has the greatest intersection with the hunger issue.

In addition “The Alaska Commission on Aging began working on a new State Plan for Senior Services during a March 10, 2006 face-to-face meeting of the State Plan Steering Committee. Under requirements of the Older Americans Act, states must submit a state plan for approval by the U.S. Administration on Aging to qualify for continued funding to support such programs as meals at senior centers, home delivered meals, various support services including transportation, family care giving, preventative health, legal services, the Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman, and Adult Protective Services. The current Plan was approved for extension, and a new Plan is anticipated to be approved before June 30, 2007, with a new effective date of July 1, 2007.” The plan is available at: <http://www.alaskaaging.org/FINALSTATEPLAN2004-2006.pdf> .

The drawback to the commission is similar to the one suggested for the Alaska Children’s Trust Board, i.e. it relates to a select portion of the total Alaska population.

Score out of 10: 7

Alaska Community Service Commission

Website: <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/asccsc/home.htm>

Board/Commission profile:

The mission statement of the commission is “[w]orking together to foster, support and promote the ethic of service and volunteerism and to engage Alaskans of all ages and backgrounds in tangible, results-oriented community projects.”

Possible intersections/comments:

The support of volunteerism has clear links to the work of charitable anti-hunger agencies. Part of the sustainability of increased physical capacity will be the staffing of expanded facilities. Part of the commission’s work is “to oversee grants provided to local non-profit and community agencies to run national service programs like AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America.” Greater exploitation of this source of volunteers is possible through this commission.

Score out of 10: 5

Alaska Humanities Forum

Website: <http://www.akhf.org/>

Board/Commission profile:

"The mission of the Alaska Humanities Forum is to use the wisdom and methods of the humanities to enrich the civic, intellectual and cultural life of all Alaskans."

Possible intersections/comments:

Other than the strengthening of civil society in Alaska and research opportunities this particular body offers few hunger issue intersections.

Score out of 10: 2

Alaska Mental Health Board

Website: <http://hss.state.ak.us/amhb/>

Board/Commission profile:

"The mission of Alaska's Mental Health System is to assist people with mental disorders to realize their potential for a life of health and independence through care, treatment, and rehabilitation, which maximizes client choice and to prevent, to the extent possible, the incidence of mental disorders by guaranteeing access to a broad range of service options through comprehensive and integrated programs."

Possible intersections/comments:

The board has a strictly medical focus. Additionally, while members of the population who suffer from mental disorders are vulnerable to poverty, the attachment of the hunger issue as a health concern would further stigmatize this demographic. The dormant Stakeholder Participation Project (due to lack of funding) could include anti-hunger agencies.

Score out of 10: 2

Alaska State Emergency Response Commission

Website: <http://www.ak-prepared.com/serc/>

Board/Commission profile:

"Federal legislation requires each state to have a State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) and outlines its duties. In 1986, Congress passed the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) with deals emergency response planning, and community right-to-know regarding hazardous materials (HAZMAT)."

Possible intersections/comments:

No possible intersections. A commission on disaster preparedness in the event of a natural disaster, if it existed, would also not be of interest to highlighting the day-to-day challenges of hunger faced by agencies and clients alike.

Score out of 10: 0

Board of Education and Early Development

Website: http://www.eed.state.ak.us/state_board/

Board/Commission profile:

The mission statement of this board is “to ensure quality standards-based instruction to improve academic achievement for all students.”

Possible intersections/comments:

The board has an obvious emphasis on educational goals. However, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development does administer the federal child nutrition programs and one of the stated goals of the board is to “form partnerships with other organizations, including health services, tribal entities, and the business community critical to closing the achievement gap, especially for those groups identified as the lowest performing based upon assessment data.” The link between poor nutrition and poor achievement provides an intersection between hunger as a health issue and this specific board.

Score out of 10: 5

Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Website: <http://www.dps.state.ak.us/cdvsa/asp/>

Board/Commission profile:

The mission of this council is “to reduce the causes and incidence and to alleviate the effects of domestic violence and sexual assault.”

Possible intersections/comments:

Tenuous intersections exist between this council and hunger. The likely focuses of the council in preventing domestic violence and sexual assault are not to be found in hunger. Also the linking of the two issues is highly dangerous because of the criminality dealt with by the council. Agencies of Food Bank of Alaska which are shelters, access food for *victims* of domestic abuse and this may constitute alleviation of the effects of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Score out of 10: 2

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Advisory Council

Website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/fbci/>

Board/Commission profile:

“Two primary responsibilities that the FBCI Advisory Council has are to advise the Office and the Governor on policies and practice to increase the contribution of faith-based and community organizations, and to promote service partnerships between faith, community and governmental entities.”

Possible intersections/comments:

Many charitable anti-hunger agencies are faith-based. All of them are community organizations. A place on the advisory council would not highlight the problem of hunger or the challenges faced by clients. On the other hand the needs of anti-hunger agencies could be served by participation. Already on the council, and involved in anti-hunger work, are the following prominent agencies:

- Covenant House Alaska
- Food Bank of Alaska
- The Glory Hole

Score out of 10: 7

Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education

Website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/Gcdse/>

Board/Commission profile:

“The Council uses planning, capacity building, systems change, and advocacy to create change for people with disabilities. Consistent with our State Plan we work towards systems change in areas including housing, employment, early intervention, special education, lifelong learning, independent living and inclusion in the community.”

Possible intersections/comments:

While this is a social service body, the work done the council cannot be recommended for the purposes of the anti-hunger network. The council’s focus is on independent living for those with disabilities and special education needs. The attachment of the hunger issue to the council’s work of integration would not be viewed beneficially by the council’s members. Also there are no specific statistics relating to the food needs of this demographic.

Score out of 10: 3

Homeless Council

Website: <http://gov.state.ak.us/boards/factsheet.php?i=217>

Board/Commission profile:

The work of the council is to form “an action plan to address homelessness which must include: 1) fiscal and demographic information, 2) an inventory and analysis of existing activity and programs in the state, 3) an inventory and assessment of existing statutory and regulatory provisions, 4) short and long term statewide strategies, and 5) performance measure and accountability mechanisms... [The council s]hall conduct a public hearing on the issue of homelessness...shall monitor and review implementation of action plan and shall annually provide to the governor a report containing findings and recommendations.”

Possible intersections/comments:

1 in 10 food pantry clients are homeless. There is a definite link between homelessness and hunger but 9 in 10 food pantry clients are not homeless. The danger in attaching the hunger issue to the work of this council is labeling the hungry as predominately homeless. Focus on the working poor, as the largest group of people accessing emergency food, needs to be maintained in the opinion of this report.

Score out of 10: 5

State Commission for Human Rights

Website: <http://www.gov.state.ak.us/aschr/>

Board/Commission profile:

“The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights is the state agency which enforces the Alaska Human Rights Law. The Commission consists of seven persons appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature. The Commission employs a staff and maintains an office in Anchorage. The Commission has statewide powers and accepts complaints from all regions of the state.”

Possible intersections/comments:

No possible intersections. The right to food, while embodied in international human rights law, is not covered by this commission. The commission in the main deals with discrimination and hears complaints submitted by the public.

Score out of 10: 1

Conclusion

In conclusion, the report proposes three recommendations for introducing the hunger issue to the system of Boards and Commissions in the State of Alaska. They are in descending order of desirability:

1. A Hunger Commission
2. A Basic Needs Commission
3. The hunger issue attached to an existing commission

A Hunger Commission

As the report and scores relate, there is no neat fit for the hunger issue in the existing boards and commissions. Attaching hunger to other social problems such as alcoholism or homelessness risks stigmatizing all hungry people with those labels. Attaching hunger to health disabilities risks stigmatizing people with disabilities. Utilizing boards and commissions dealing with a specific demographic of the population, such as children and seniors, risks distancing the majority of people accessing emergency food-the working poor. Hunger reaches a variety of people regardless of age, ability, socio-economic status, religion or ethnicity, for this very reason alone the establishment of a separate commission is essential. More importantly, hunger has a solution and the solution is not difficult. Unlike the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, hunger can be eliminated in Alaska through a concerted effort to get food to hungry people. Additionally, increased awareness of the capacity needs to bring about the end of hunger in Alaska, through a separate board or commission, may also lead to a broader discussion about the funding of charitable anti-hunger agencies. The establishment of a Hunger Commission is pivotal to eradicating hunger in Alaska.

A Basic Needs Commission

An ambitious although less desirable option is to explore the possibility of a Basic Needs Commission. This would be established to provide basic economic and social rights such as food, housing, health and work. A Basic Needs Commission will have to have a long-term mandate if its work is to be effective in providing these rights. Part of the work of the commission will unquestionably involve the issue of poverty reduction and tackling the causes and consequences of poverty in Alaska such as substance abuse, and the circle of debt. Undoubtedly food is a basic need, without which or a lack of children and the workforce become increasingly unproductive. This not only makes hunger and furthermore poverty a social issue but also an economic one too. However, the existing boards and commissions on homelessness and alcoholism would need to be merged and their responsibilities widened for the Basic Needs Commission to be established. Such a merger could be highly political.

The hunger issue attached to an existing commission

Many of the boards and commissions researched showed a lack of compelling intersections with the hunger issue. However, 3 of the researched boards and commissions were given the highest score of 7/10, and displayed possibilities. These boards and commissions are:

- Alaska Children's Trust Board
- Alaska Commission on Aging
- Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Advisory Council

The first two of these bodies are related to sympathetic portions of Alaska's population and can be directly related to clients. The last of the three is relevant to charitable agencies. As more public awareness can be leveraged from the discussion of child or senior hunger, they could be utilized to bring the issue of hunger to the attention of legislators and the public. The strength of the coalition's membership could be used to begin a dialogue with the Alaska Children's Trust Board and the Alaska Commission on Aging on how the issue of hunger would be raised within the work of these two bodies.