



# Representative Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

Alaska State Legislature

District 1 Fairbanks

## CSHB 236 (FIN) Sponsor Statement

*"An Act extending the Alaska senior benefits payment program."*

House Bill 236 would extend the Senior Benefits Program to 2024, ensuring another six years of support for low-income seniors across Alaska. The successor to the Longevity Bonus created in 1972, the Senior Benefits Program would end in June 2018 without legislative action.

The Senior Benefits Program protects low-income seniors by providing them with modest monthly cash assistance to pay for expenses like food, heating, electricity, transportation and prescription medication. The program was established in 2007 and currently aids nearly 12,000 Alaskans ages 65 and older with incomes at 75 , 100 and 175 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Subject to appropriation from the Alaska State Legislature, assistance currently ranges from \$76 to \$250 a month for eligible seniors.

In September 2017, the House Health & Social Services Committee held a statewide listening session for Senior Benefits recipients and their advocates. We heard from hundreds of Alaskans who passionately believe the Senior Benefits Program is vital to preserving their way of life. This program protects seniors who have spent a lifetime building this state. It lends a hand to low-income seniors who need assistance to help make ends meet.

Terminating this program would put thousands of seniors at risk of losing their means for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I respectfully request your support to continue this vital program.