



Monroe County Area Agency on Aging
724B Phillips Street, Stroudsburg, PA 18360

Commissioners:

Suzanne McCool, Chairman
Theresa Merli, Vice-Chairman
Donna M.ASURE, Commissioner

Administrator:

Patricia Fretz

April, 8, 2008

Good morning, Senator Vance and members of the Aging and Youth Committee.

My name is Patty Fretz and I am the Executive Director of the Monroe County Area Agency on Aging. I am here to request your support for adequate funding for seniors.

Last year's budget to the Area Agencies on Aging did contain a 3% COLA and we appreciate your support in receiving this increase. However, I am asking you how AAAs are to provide needed services without adequate funding in this coming fiscal year.

Our mission as well as the mission for all 52 AAA in the Commonwealth is to assist older residents to remain in their own home safely for as long as possible. Consumer choice and full-participation in the decision making process are integral components to the delivery of services. Re-balancing the cost of the long term care system between institutional and community care is a priority.

When the PDA Waiver program was rolling out across the Commonwealth, the AAAs embraced the program and were pleased to be able to provide in-home services to older residents who were found both financially and medically eligible for the program. This meant that many older residents who were determined "Nursing Home Clinically Eligible" finally had an alternative to placement in a nursing home. Prior to this time, the only choice for these older residents was to enter a nursing home.

When the Nursing Home Transition Program rolled out across the state, the AAAs worked hard and continue to work hard to transition nursing home residents back to the community if appropriate. There is no waiting list for these programs and those eligible can receive the necessary services to remain or return to the community.

While the PDA Waiver Program has grown and adequately provides services to nursing home level of care seniors, there is an even larger group of seniors who need basic services, such as, personal care, home delivered meals, adult day care, respite care and other services which are funded through the Penn Care funds. Penn Care Funding has not kept pace with the growth in the senior population. This has resulted in waiting lists across the state. In Monroe County presently, there are 37 seniors on the waiting list and over 4000 across the state.

Many AAAs have had to eliminate some services, such as, home support, chore services, guardianship and environmental modifications because of the extreme shortage of funds. Senior centers have had to limit hours and some have had to close. Senior centers are a vital service offered to seniors. They provide nutritional meals, health promotion and activities that seniors would not have otherwise.

Pennsylvania legislators must realize that funding needs to be made available for those older residents who have not declined to the point that they are nursing facility clinically eligible and who without basic services such as home delivered meals and personal care may deteriorate more quickly and reach that level of care sooner. We all want to see people have choices but for many seniors there are no choices.

In the past five years there has only been a 7% increase statewide in Aging Block Grant funding while inflation has exceeded 14% during this same period. In Monroe County between 2000 and 2006, the US Census estimated that there was a 15.5% growth in population of those over 60 and an increase by 37.1% in the 85 plus population. Without adequate funding our most vulnerable seniors will be added to our waiting list.

- Mr. M shares an apartment with his daughter. His daughter works 2 low-paying jobs and consumer is home alone much of the time. They cannot afford to privately pay for services due to their high rent and other monthly expenses. Mr. M has multiple medical issues to include diabetes and severe arthritis with chronic pain. He has had several ER visits in the last year due to the fact that he does not eat in accordance w/ his diabetic diet and his blood sugar levels have spiked. He is not considered “Nursing Facility Clinically Eligible.” He would benefit from Home Delivered Meals and is on the waiting list. Due to arthritis he is at high risk for falls and is not able to bathe himself w/o assistance. He will not allow his daughter to assist, but would be willing to accept this help from an aide and is also on the waiting list for this. His daughter has also requested that a PERS Unit be installed because she is worried Mr. M will go into diabetic shock or fall while she is working.
- Mrs. G. had to move in with her daughter when she suffered a stroke. She was not determined “Nursing Home Clinically Eligible.” Daughter must work and cannot leave her mother alone. She has wandered out of the house and her daughter fears that she will get hurt. Daughter has found someone to stay with her mother while she works, however, they cannot afford the full cost. Mrs. G. is on the Family Caregiver Support Program waiting list.

With the new fiscal year approaching, the AAA’s will be preparing contracts with our providers of services. They will be looking at their cost to provide the services due to their salary increases and gas prices and they will most likely increase the cost of unit of service to the AAA. This will mean that waiting list will continue to grow.

All of the AAA's across the state are in the process of completing their "Four Year Plan." Through surveys and focus groups each AAA must spell out the priorities, goals and objectives for the agency from 2008-2012. After identifying the needs of the older residents of Monroe County, it was not easy determining how we are going to meet these needs without adequate funding.

Some counties like Monroe and Pike as well as others have had a tremendous increase in the senior population since 1990 and these counties have not received funding to address this growth due to the funding formula's "hold harmless" provision.

While we recognize that there are consumers whose needs are too great to be met in the community and need nursing home care, there are many more seniors who wish to remain at home with sufficient services provided in their home. These seniors should remain in the setting of their choice with dignity.

Thank you again for holding this hearing and your attention to your senior's needs.

Patricia Fretz
Executive Director