



**New York State Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

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**Testimony
Town Hall Meeting – February 20, 2009**

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Board of Directors, NYS Association of Area Agencies on Aging
and
Director, Orleans County Office for the Aging

Good afternoon, my name is Pam Canham, and I am representing the New York State Association of Area Agencies on Aging. I serve on the Association's Board of Directors, and I am also Director of the Orleans County Office for the Aging.

Let me begin by sharing some of the challenges facing seniors here in Western New York:

Mrs. Smith is 86 years old, legally blind, and receives a personal care aide through caregiver respite. These respite funds are no longer available. A few years ago, Mrs. Smith loaned her savings to her family to help support them financially. Now the children are unable to repay her due to their recent economic struggles. She has nothing except her Social Security and small pension. She has some EISEP services, which have recently been cut due to funding reductions.

Mrs. Jones is 74 and is the primary caregiver to her 88-year-old husband. He was recently hospitalized. When he was discharged home, Mrs. Jones refused home care believing she could care for her husband, even though she has a recent fracture of the left wrist. She is not able to assist her husband in standing, and now requires assistance with his personal care. They are on a waiting list for EISEP services, with an anticipated wait time of over 6 months.

Mr. Davis is 79 and is the primary caregiver for his 14-year-old grandson. Critical medical issues including hospitalization have made caring for his grandson difficult. He currently has personal care assistance in place through EISEP; which will soon be reduced or eliminated due to funding cutbacks.

These are the stories of the seniors that we serve every day. Each individual brings a unique set of circumstances, requiring thorough and thoughtful staff to sort through the issues to bring together the most effective solutions to address their needs. We piece together local, state and federal funding to put together a care plan, make a referral, or arrange for desperately needed transportation for ongoing medical care. Sadly, this fragile web of services is unraveling due to funding cutbacks at a time when people need these services the most. These are the poorest and most at risk individuals in our community. A county in Western NY recently reviewed their caseloads and reported that 68% of their clients were at or below poverty in January of 2008. One year later, the number has jumped to 80%. Even level funding of programs will not be sufficient for the need that is becoming evident.

2009-10 State Budget

Our Association believes the State Budget should focus resources on community-based critical care direct services to keep seniors at home and reduce Medicaid costs and nursing home placements. The strongest impact will be achieved by strengthening and enhancing community-based programs with a proven track record.

Utilizing Discretionary Funds from the Economic Stimulus Plan for core aging programs will reduce healthcare costs and assist vulnerable elderly. NYSAAAA has identified funding priorities as follows:

Priority One **Increase SNAP to \$26 million – A “fork-ready” program for vulnerable seniors**
(+ \$4,620,000 more than the \$21,380,000 in 2009-10 Executive Budget)

Reductions in SNAP funding and extreme demand have resulted in waiting lists for congregate and home delivered meals for seniors. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutritious meals and related services to frail, homebound seniors at high nutritional risk, enabling them to remain in the community. An increase in SNAP funding will have an immediate positive impact on seniors.

Priority Two **Restore EISEP to \$48,973,000**
(+ \$2,938,000 more than the \$46,035,000 in 2009-10 Executive Budget)

Reductions in EISEP funding have resulted in waiting lists throughout the state. Without these cost-efficient services, many seniors will spend down to Medicaid and cost the state more. The Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP) provides case management services and in-home supports for the frailest elderly who represent the fastest growing age group.

Priority Three **Restore Funding for CSE to \$16,289,000**
(+ \$977,000 more than the \$15,312,000 in Executive Budget)

Established in 1979, the Community Services for the Elderly program (CSE) provides non-medical community-based services to frail, low-income seniors helping them to remain at home. The program offers flexible service options to meet unique needs of senior citizens.

Priority Four **Continue and Make Permanent COLA Funds for CSE, EISEP and SNAP**

While we understand the fiscal constraints in the state budget, we emphasize the importance of the COLA in recruiting and retaining workers that provide aging services in the community. Elimination of

the COLA for SNAP, EISEP and CSE translates into reduced services and will result in longer waiting lists for services. We urge the Governor and Legislature to reinstitute the COLA in the budget for fiscal year 2009-10.

Priority Five Continue NY Connects Choices for Long Term Care Services Funding

NY Connects provides information and assistance for consumers of all ages seeking long term care services. NY Connects helps consumers remain in community-based settings. We appreciate NYSOFA's commitment to maintain the local implementation grants to the counties, even though overall state funding was reduced.

Priority Six Restore Transportation Operating Expenses to \$2,000,000
(+\$1,079,000 more than the \$921,000 in 2009-10 Executive Budget)

Transportation remains a problem for suburban and rural counties. The Executive Budget proposes a mere \$921,000 in transportation funds. Slashing transportation funds by more than 50% has had an immediate negative impact on seniors. A survey last month of 8 counties in Western NY revealed a combined reduction of 3,694 trips in recent months. This means that thousands of seniors have been denied transportation to medical appointments, adult day care programs, and other services.

Priority Seven Support \$2 Million to AAAs for EPIC Counseling for Seniors

We strongly support the Executive Budget's \$2 million for AAAs to assist seniors enrolled in EPIC in obtaining assistance with Medicare Part D, through the existing HIICAPs (Health Insurance Information, Counseling & Assistance Programs). Utilizing a statewide approach for this funding assists seniors in all areas of the state. In addition, seniors using HIICAP are linked to the wide array of services provided by AAAs, potentially accessing additional services. A statewide approach and linkage to local services underscores the importance of this funding.

Closing Statement

In closing, the safety net that AAAs have provided over the years is being challenged by the needs of a growing aging population that requires more intensive services. Investing state funds to maintain and expand AAA services is a cost-effective alternative to more medically intensive and costly health care services. Seniors and their families want to use their resources wisely and keep their loved ones at home for as long as possible. **These services are critical to older New Yorkers in order to remain safely and with dignity in their own homes.**