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## Advocating for Illinois Older Adults In the Face of a Budget Impasse

*By Jonathan Lavin  
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Area Agencies on Aging are mandated by the U.S. Older Americans Act to advocate on behalf of our older citizens. AgeOptions has been true to that mandate over the past 11 months as the State of Illinois has not been able to pass a budget with adequate revenues to meet the needs of its citizens. In August of 2015, AgeOptions reached out to mayors and asked that municipalities communicate to the Governor and General Assembly that federal funding already appropriated to Illinois was being held up in Washington because Illinois failed to release it to serve older persons. Seven municipalities sent those letters. In October, in a rare realization that the Budget Impasse was hurting Illinois, the Governor and General Assembly finally released those dollars.



After that time, the Illinois Department on Aging advocated to federal courts to include a number of services under Illinois-Federal Consent Decrees. The result was that vital services of Home Delivered Meals, Adult Protective Services and some Long Term Care Ombudsman Program dollars were released. Already covered in that consent decree were home care funding for Medicaid-eligible older persons under the Illinois Community Care Program, but none of the vendors received any funding until the meticulous job was completed of splitting those enrolled in Medicaid from those not enrolled. The result was that just under half of the home-bound elders served in the Community Care Program started to see Illinois pay for their services. Over half of the clients have continued to receive services, but providers of those services have not seen any funding for their efforts.



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Your Update from AgeOptions

Currently a number of agencies are suing the state on constitutional grounds asserting that Illinois has failed to meet Illinois constitutional requirements for the passing of a budget and for fairly meeting constitutional requirements for contracting to important suppliers of service.

Area Agencies on Aging now receive federal Older Americans Act dollars, court ordered home-delivered meal funding, Long-Term Care Ombudsman funding and administrative support for the Adult Protective Services Program, but nothing is flowing for required federal-state dollars under the Older Americans Act, Tobacco Settlement funding for the essential Senior Health Assistance Program, administrative support to the Illinois Department on Aging for the Community Care Program, and a variety of other programs that improve the lives of older persons.

In response to this unprecedented impasse, AgeOptions and its 12 partner area agencies on aging have produced weekly Alerts chronicling the decline and loss of Illinois' precious Aging Network. These began in October and continue every week!

More than 230 community organizations receive support from area agencies on aging and often over 500,000 older persons are served each year. Vital information and assistance, options counseling, transportation services, legal assistance, home care and a variety of other community based services have received 30 percent less reimbursement than originally included in the Illinois Department on Aging Planning Letters for Fiscal Year 2016.

The Governor and General Assembly ended the regular 2016 legislative session without reaching agreement on appropriations and there is no indication that agreement is in sight to end the impasse and serve Illinois older citizens.



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Your Update from AgeOptions

Jonathan Lavin, on behalf of AgeOptions and the Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging, has testified to the Illinois House about the impact of the Budget Impasse, and has prepared testimony to the Senate identifying the importance of funding senior services in Illinois. The fact is that dedicated effort does not always equal progress.

Even in the darkness of Illinois, one sign of light did occur this past winter – President Barack Obama signed the reauthorization of the U.S. Older Americans Act in mid-February. Congress rallied around a proven program and made sure that it continues.