

Illinois Alliance For Home and Community Care

**Testimony for the Deficit Reduction Committee
March 10, 2009
9:00 AM, Room 212 Capitol Building**

Thank you Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee

The Alliance for Home and Community Care is an informal group of aging service advocates and organizations that support a holistic and comprehensive approach to aging services in Illinois. The Alliance includes the major home and community based service associations for aging service providers and was organized by Illinois AARP. The individual organizations that constitute the Alliance will be presenting testimony to the Deficit Reduction Committee individually. The dollars directed towards each line item and service category in the Illinois Department on Aging budget represents a deep and concerted effort by local community service agencies to reach and serve older persons to the best of their ability. The striking element of this effort is that their programs fully involve the faith based community, local governments, volunteers, United Ways, community foundations, individual donations, corporate support and fees paid by older persons and their families to provide care for their older loved ones.

It is the responsibility of each program to explain their relationship to the serious work of this committee as to which State investments may be reduced or changed to assure that Illinois deals with the immediate deficit situation. It is clearly in your agenda to not permit the present problem to deny the demographic and service imperatives of the future growth and needs of each population. We will be coalescing around your decisions to support initiatives that will pay for the services that are so well conceived in the Department on Aging budget, and to offer our support of the current aging service network and the remarkable outcomes they deliver with modest state support.

We highlight the importance and value of the following senior services which Illinois provides leadership and support with state funding:

Older Americans Act Services: These are services coordinated and funded by the Area Agencies on Aging which are the entities that draw down over \$60 million in federal support for such community services as home delivered meals, senior centers, luncheon programs, transportation, information and assistance with finding help for older adults and their caregivers, and a variety of other service staples in your districts. These services are available to all of your senior constituents regardless of their current financial status. Because funding for these programs are limited to the appropriation levels increases in the costs of providing these services place severe strain on these programs causing them to limit the amount of service they can provide or the areas they can cover. Already these services are supported by federal funds and local matching dollars in addition to state dollars. Reductions to funding will result in further limitations on the number of services they can provide and the regional coverage areas.

Community Care Program: The Community Care Program provides home and community based options for care for older adults that would otherwise be eligible for nursing care services through a federally matched Medicaid waiver. While this program meets the needs of older adults in the environment seniors prefer, it also provides a significant cost savings to the state. These services are provided at only a fraction of the cost of facility based care and every single client on the program meets the disability threshold for nursing care. Reductions in funding for these services have already created an unprecedented back log in bills carried from one year to the next. If funding continues to fall short these seniors will have only one option for service and that is facility placement. On average, this option will over double the amount the state will pay for their care.

Comprehensive Care Coordination. Illinois is supporting a remarkably effective system of individual advocacy, planning for care and effective gatekeeping for state and federal Medicaid waived services in the Case Coordination Unit system. Now that all

older persons in Illinois are able to access a comprehensive assessment, guidance on available services and costs, and assistance in staying in their own homes and communities as long as it is wise, we are just beginning to see the full impact on the costs and care responsibility of the State. We ask that this commitment be sustained at utilization levels and the important measurements of success be followed without disruptions over the next year.

Long Term Care Ombudsman: The long term care ombudsman program protects the rights of older adults in long term care facilities. This program works at a local level often with volunteers to visits long term care facilities to ensure that the residents are safe and receiving the care they need. The ombudsmen work closely with monitors from the Department of Public Health to identify and fix problems seniors in facilities face. A part of the funding for this program comes from federal penalties which are expected to be reduced this year.

Elder Abuse and Neglect: The Elder Abuse and Neglect received reductions in funding last year. These services are critical for finding solutions for older adults that are being abused. Law enforcement is not enough. Often the abuser is also providing critical care and if there are no support options available the abused senior feels they must continue to live in a dangerous environment. A few years ago self neglect laws were passed by the legislature but no funding has yet been appropriated to implement the provisions of the law.

Senior Health Assistance Programs. – Community agencies are providing a remarkable service to over a half million Illinois citizens through the provision of accurate and coordinated information on pharmaceutical and other health benefits designed to reach Illinois Senior and Disabled citizens. Illinois programs lead the nation in responsiveness, wrap around effectiveness and citizen's appreciation. This system is faced with major changes in funding and significant challenges in the coming year. We have demonstrated that support for pharmaceutical assistance and access to those benefits contribute to the

reduction in the numbers of long-term care facility clientele each year. In Illinois, the savings related to nursing home diversion are have a ration of close to 4 to 1 each month.

Home Health: Home Health Care is skilled nursing, home health aide, occupational, physical and speech therapy services provided in the home for treatment of an illness or injury. The services are prescribed by a physician to home bound patients. Without this care patients would have to receive higher cost of care services in a hospital, rehabilitation facility or nursing home.

These services allow older adults to remain safe and independent as they get older and begin to struggle with the effects of aging. But these services also represent exceptional cost savings to the state through federal and local matching funds, as well as cost efficient alternatives to state funded institutional placement. The Illinois Alliance encourages this committee and all elected leaders to support funding for these programs but also to recognize the cost to state funds and human dignity of cuts to these services.