



# Milwaukee County Department on Aging



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Commission on Aging*

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Dear Aging Advocates, Committee Members, and Community Stakeholders:

I am writing to you today to provide you information about the 2018 Milwaukee County Budget cuts and how they will affect older adults in Milwaukee County. We remain profoundly concerned about the impact of the County Board's \$15 million in service cuts. While we have to implement the Board's action, we remain committed to meeting the needs of older adults in Milwaukee County.

The Department on Aging together with the County Executive undertook a careful and deliberate process to create next year's budget. Given the declining level of support the County receives from the state, coupled with the community's rising need for reliable transportation, social services, and public safety services, we knew this would be a difficult budget. We also know that people in the community are struggling when it comes to paying more for County government. That is why County leaders made sure that the \$30 million budget gap was balanced with both savings and efficiencies, as well as new revenue to ensure that the County is sustainable not only for the coming year – but also into the future.

We presented these savings, along with needed investments in critical priorities throughout the County to our employees, to the public, to the County Executive, and to the County Board over a series of several months as part of the budget process. Even so, overwhelmingly, we heard that members of the community rely on County services such as our Senior Centers, Meals on Wheels, and other Aging Programs. The Community did not want to see austerity measures or the kinds of cuts, project delays, and budget gimmicks we have seen from state and federal government officials.

As the frontline providers of services, we know that the people who would have the hardest time absorbing any new revenues would be the ones most deeply impacted by across-the-board service cuts. Therefore, we urged the County Board to work with us to avoid this needless pain. While a vehicle registration fee might not have been anyone's favorite option, it was a much better one than \$15 million in service cuts.

However, the County Board's budget is now official County policy and County departments are left with no choice but to implement \$15 million in service cuts. We understand that some of these cuts do sound "deplorable" as Chairman Lipscomb described them - and they are. But to be clear there are no good choices or easy cuts.

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Aging Resource Center: (414) 289-6874 | TOLL FREE: 1-866-229-9695 | TRS: 7-1-1 | [www.county.milwaukee.gov/aging](http://www.county.milwaukee.gov/aging)

The mission of the Milwaukee County Department on Aging is to affirm the dignity and value of older adults in this county by supporting their choices for living in, and giving to, our community.

The County Board demanded \$15 million in cuts and we have to implement them. Any possible cut, project delay, or service reduction would be “deplorable” for some members for the community. Simply shifting the pain to different constituents doesn’t make it go away.

Public safety will be hit the hardest by the County Board’s \$15 million budget cut. The Sheriff and House of Corrections will suffer nearly one million dollars in cuts. At the height of the opioid epidemic, the County Board has slashed hundreds of thousands of dollars from the district attorney, medical examiner, and office of emergency management.

The County Board’s cuts to transit were identified in several places to obscure the overall impact, however, it is important to note that the transit system is hit the hardest in the Chairman’s amendment, with a loss of over \$4 million in cuts. This includes a cut to capital, operating, as well as reserve accounts. Pursuant to County Board Action, 10 transit routes will be eliminated including those that provide school service in West Allis, Cudahy, Wauwatosa, and St. Francis as well as routes serving Oak Creek, Brown Deer, and MATC North and Downtown.

As we look into the future, the County Executive believes that the only way to fix the County’s challenges is to work together and collaborate on solutions – not only with the County Board, but with all community stakeholders.

The Milwaukee County Department of Aging will be experiencing roughly \$105,000 in budget cuts. There are only a few areas of our services that are not statutorily mandated where these cuts can be made. These are: Senior Nutrition, Senior Centers, and Elder Abuse. In order to protect those most vulnerable members of our population the budget cuts to the Department on Aging budget will need to come from the Senior Center budget.

We want to assure you that all five County Senior Centers will still remain open next year and operating five days a week. The meal programs will continue to operate within the Senior Centers as well as other valuable programming and activities. We recognize that a budget cut of any amount will affect the level of services provided to older adult but we will work closely with Unison (previously Interfaith) to ensure that there is minimal impact on the participants in our Senior Centers. We will also continue to look for additional funding opportunities through grants and partnerships.

Older adults may be affected by the budget cuts to County Senior Centers and also by budget cuts in other areas such as the bus service through Milwaukee County Transit. But the Milwaukee County Department on Aging will remain dedicated to meeting the needs of older adults by connecting them to critical resources available through our Aging Resource Center and quality programs and services.

Sincerely,



Holly Davis

Executive Director, Milwaukee County Department on Aging

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