



EXHIBIT 12
DATE Fri Feb 4 2005
HB _____

February 4, 2005

To: Chair and Members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee

Re: DPHHS Budget for Aging Services and Senior and Long Term Care

Madame Chair, I am Joy Bruck, a Volunteer Advocate for AARP Montana, and I stand as in friendly opposition to the department's proposed budget for the purpose of offering some concerns.

AARP Montana is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with 143,000 members in Montana. In our recent Membership Survey our members ranked affordable healthcare, and staying at home as we age as top personal concerns in 2005.

AARP is an active participant in the Aging Services Network that includes the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging members, Area Agency on Aging staff, Senior Center directors, and aging advocates like AARP and the Montana Senior Citizens Association.

We are supporting the passage of the pop tax proposed in SB 324 which would raise \$10 Million for an Older Montanans Trust Fund to get ready for Boomers when they reach eligibility for Older Americans Act services, in about 4 years.

But SB 324 also raises an additional \$9-10 million for Older Americans Act services, critical renovation of some of our senior centers, and funding for senior companions and other services. Six million dollars is for Older Americans Act services that our members and their families depend on.

Here are our concerns:

1. While we recognize the department has restored the \$257,000 cut in Meals on Wheels made last session (at a 2001 level we believe), we know from our trips around the state that this will not help us meet our current need for meals. More funding for meals on wheels and congregate meals is included in the pop tax proposal. Without pop tax revenue, we question whether our current growing need for meals funding will be met by the budget alone.
2. Finally, we are concerned that if the pop tax proposal in SB 324 does not pass, the \$6 million included in SB 324 for Older Americans Act services will be lost to

our seniors and their families who count on the state to help them. The \$6 million is designated to bring our services up to current need including Older Americans Act services of:

- Meals, meals on wheels and congregate meals at centers;
- Transportation to doctor and other appointments, one of the most common needs named by seniors and their families;
- Outreach to help educate families and seniors of the services available, and outreach to remote, isolated, or homebound people;
- Respite care, short-term relief for caregivers and family members of frail elders.

What will be the impact on the Senior/Long Term Care budget's ability to meet current in near future aging needs if the pop tax does not pass?

We are concerned that the proposed budget is not adequate to meet current needs we've heard about over the last year from seniors, their families, senior centers, and now from county commissioners who are not able to support their county's senior center as in the past.

We raise these concerns because full funding of aging services to meet current needs is a priority for AARP Montana. We will listen carefully to the answers the department gives to these questions.

Thank you for your hard work in supporting Montana elders and their families. In just a couple more sessions we will face the overwhelming needs of the Boomer generation as they begin to draw on state and federally provided services. We remain ready to work with you and your excellent staff on this important budget.