



CASCADE COUNTY

SENATE FINANCE & CLAIMS

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Testimony before Senate Finance and Claims Committee

March 18, 2011

Chairman Lewis and members of the committee, my name is Joe Briggs and I appear before you today in my role as a Cascade County Commissioner and on behalf of the other two Cascade County Commissioners.

As a county commissioner I am acutely aware of the difficulty in balancing a budget and have an appreciation for the difficult task that you are facing in light of the need to reduce the overall spending of state government to a sustainable level.

My comments today will focus on two key points; first I wish to make you aware that although the majority of the services provided to our aging population are done under contract through not for profit organizations, three counties including my own provide these services under contract from DPHHS. I can assure you that in Cascade County we deliver these services with a very low administrative overhead to ensure maximum benefit is delivered to the clients. We do this by having our general fund absorb all indirect costs such as Human Resources support, legal support, computer support and other miscellaneous costs that are normally charged against grants. This coupled with our overall frugal approach to operations allows us to maximize the impact of the funds you give us to support aging services.

My second point relates to the danger of budget cuts that result not in overall savings to the taxpayer but instead result in cost shifting from one line item to another or from one level of government to another. I am concerned specifically about the proposed cuts in HB 2 as they relate to the Meals on Wheels, Senior Transportation and Home Attendants. Each of these programs provide services that allow our seniors to remain in their own homes rather than having to move to much more costly long term care facilities.

Since the State of Montana is pays a portion of these long term facility costs, I cannot help but be concerned that cutting the funds from these low cost programs will actually cost the state money more due to the state's portion of the resulting increased costs.

In Cascade County alone, the current funding levels contained within HB 2 would cause a reduction of 30,000 meals a year in Cascade County as well causing reductions in Home Attendant Care and Senior Transportation. How many seniors these changes will cause to leave their homes for the more expensive long term care facilities is anyone's guess but I believe that it needs to be a consideration in your deliberations. I sincerely hope that you are able to restore funding to these three critical services.

In closing, I would like to thank you for service to the state and wish you well in this difficult task of balancing the state's expenses to its revenue.

Prepared by Cascade County Commissioner Joe Briggs

Presented March 18, 2011