

Thank you for inviting testimony on next year's budget.

My name is Chris Shaw, and I have worked for the Central Vermont Council on Aging for 19 years. I have held several positions in that time, but all involved working directly with clients. In those 19 years I have seen a multitude of changes, but the two which have the greatest impact on my work, and my client's wellbeing, are the increasing complexity of our systems, and the number of people who need to access them.

To illustrate the subject of complexity, I have brought a visual aid. This flow chart is used by our staff to help them be sure they are helping clients apply for the correct programs. This illustrates the flow of possible Green Mountain Care Healthcare programs available for individuals on Medicare. This is just one of a number of complex systems we expect seniors to be able to navigate. There are equally complex systems related to Social Security, Medicare, 3SQ, and subsidized housing, to name a few. To add a degree of difficulty, many of our clients may not hear well on the phone, or see well enough to be able to read the correspondence they receive. These clients turn to us for help navigating these systems, and without that help many of them would be without the vital programs they depend on.

One program that actually is simple for clients to navigate is the Meals on Wheels program. A call to the nearest mealsite is generally all that is required for a homebound person to begin getting regular hot meals delivered to their door. Almost as important as the meal is the fact that it is delivered by a friendly person, who gets to know them and can report if they see any problems. Mealsites in our region are compensated by CVCOA at **\$3.54 per meal**, even though the meals cost substantially more. Meals are provided by donation, and many clients cannot afford to contribute the true cost of the meals, which has forced some mealsites to establish waiting lists. We hope the legislature will be able to increase the level of support for this vital program, which allows seniors to remain at home and independent, which is not only the setting of choice for most clients, but also the most cost effective.

In the US, approximately 10,000 people per day turn 65. Those people suddenly have to navigate an entire new system, usually with no prior knowledge of how it works. These are the people who call us for assistance, and they are not just low income or poorly educated people. We have doctors and lawyers and engineers and teachers who come to us because they are unable to understand the new world they have been thrust into, and in recent years our staffing has actually been reduced. Please help the Agencies on Aging continue to meet the needs of older Vermonters with timely, efficient services.