

Senator Ellen Corbett
Chair Senate Budget Subcommittee #3
Capitol Building, Room 5019
Sacramento, CA 95814

March 5, 2014

Re: SSI-SSP Issues in the 2014-15 Budget

Dear Senator Corbett,

The Senior Services Coalition represents over 41 organizations that provide health and supportive services to over 50,000 seniors in Alameda County. We are writing to express our deep concern regarding SSI/SSP issues in the Governor's 2014-15 budget proposal.

Over 1.3 million very vulnerable Californians survive on Supplemental Security Income/ State Supplementary Program income – over 53,000 of them live in Alameda County. SSI/SSP provides a monthly cash benefit to seniors, the blind and people with disabilities who have little or no other income or assets.

The grants for individuals are capped at \$877 a month, a combination of federal SSI funds (\$721) and state SSP General Fund (\$156). California's Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) provides assistance to persons ineligible for SSI solely due to their immigration status, though they receive \$10 less than SSI/SSP recipients. SSI/SSP and CAPI recipients are ineligible for SNAP assistance and so can't supplement their income with increased food stamp benefits as recipients in many other states can do.

The federal government provides an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) based on the federal consumer price index. California used to provide a COLA, but this was repealed in 2009. Even before the COLA was repealed the SSP COLA was often suspended and the last state COLA was provided in the 2006-7 budget. Since then, the state has cut its contribution to the SSI grant for individuals down to the federal minimum of \$156 a month. SSI/SSP grants for couples declined significantly also; grants for couples are *lower* in 2014 than they were in 2007.

In January 2007 the SSI/SSP grant of \$856 a month was equal to 100.4% of the federal poverty level for a single individual. In January 2014, the SSI/SSP grant is worth just 90.2% of the federal poverty level. The effect of the grant cuts and the repealing of the COLA was to push 1.3 million blind, aged and disabled Californians below the federal poverty level.

SSC asks the Legislature to undo the harm that has been done since 2007. By restoring the SSP grant cuts and providing the COLAs, the Legislature can immediately reduce poverty for more than 1.3 million in California. We urge the Committee to recommend this action for the 2014/15 budget.

Sincerely,



Wendy Peterson
Director, Senior Services Coalition of Alameda County