

November 17, 2022

Dear Erie County Council members,

The Independent Council on Aging, Inc. (ICA) is a voluntary, not-for-profit coalition of individuals, agencies, and businesses from the public and private sector who provide services to seniors in Erie and Erie County. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for mature adults while fostering a positive image of aging.

We are writing regarding the County budget for 2023. Our specific concern is the proposed cuts to GECAC, especially the proposed cut of \$460,000+ to the Area Agency on Aging (AAA). If these cuts are made, the AAA will additionally lose approximately \$430,000 in matching funds from the Federal government, totaling nearly \$900,000 lost that could go to benefit our area seniors.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2021 19% of Erie County's population was aged 65 and over, meaning over 51,000 seniors are living in Erie County and could potentially benefit from GECAC's programs such as Meals on Wheels, Personal Care/Home Health services, and local Senior Centers.

Seniors face a multitude of challenges as they age. A chief complaint from seniors is loneliness. As they age, they face loss of their career, their families and friends and their health. Senior centers in our county, most of which are funded by GECAC, provide opportunities to our seniors where they can exercise, learn new hobbies, and socialize – all efforts to combat loneliness.

With COVID, we all faced periods of loneliness. Cut off from family and friends and faced with an uncertainty of when we could return to in-person get togethers. Our seniors, many who live alone, faced isolation at even greater levels. We are JUST getting back on track. We NEED to continue providing warm and welcoming places for our seniors.

GECAC assists with in-home personal care, housekeeping, etc. Did you know that to pay privately for assistance in the home it is over \$20 per hour to go through a private duty agency? These costs add up quickly and countless seniors cannot afford these services and end up in Nursing Homes. The monthly private pay rate in most nursing homes is over \$10,000 per month. GECAC's assistance with Personal Care services versus a Skilled Nursing level of care offsets a financial burden on countless families and taxpayers. We need funding to continue to offer services in seniors' homes, especially to those who are low income, to ensure that they remain safe and cared for.

Approving the proposed budget would be disastrous for our local seniors. The older population will continue to increase and we need to build and improve upon services to help them to thrive in the community, rather than removing the vital funding already in place.

We respectfully ask you to thoughtfully consider the negative impacts that cutting GECAC's funding would have on the great generation that made Erie City and County the wonderful place it is. Please vote against passing the current county budget.

Sincerely,

The Independent Council on Aging