



Op-Ed: County Budget Cuts Will Hurt Most Vulnerable in Our Community

By Danny Jones, Chief Executive Officer

Erie County Executive, Brenton Davis, has proposed to eliminate nearly \$1 million from the county's 2023 budget that funds vital services for Erie County's older adults, youth, and underemployed individuals. County Council will be voting on this crucial funding on November 23rd.

The proposed budget eliminates \$992,000 in services provided by the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC). Here are the problems that the proposed cuts create for older adults:

- \$463,000 will be cut from GECAC's Area Agency on Aging (AAA). These services play a critical role in helping older adults remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Services that would be impacted include Meals on Wheels, nine senior centers, in-home health, and personal care services as well as our AmeriCorps Seniors programs—Retired Senior Volunteer Program and Foster Grandparents. These funding cuts would impact 10,000 seniors in Erie County. Not only would older adults be impacted, but schools and organizations would lose 170,000 hours of volunteer time that our 400 AmeriCorps Seniors provide. We saw the dire effects that social isolation had on older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many seniors, especially low-income older adults, had no visitors, no way to get food, and no one to monitor their physical or mental health. We are just beginning to turn around the adverse effects that the last few years have inflicted on our elderly population. Cutting funding for senior services will make the long-term prognosis of our seniors disastrous for short-term gain.
- If the county cuts funding for aging services, GECAC will lose an additional \$430,000 in matching funds each year from the federal government. In total, we will have to eliminate \$893,000 worth of vital services for older adults throughout Erie County at a time when seniors need more services, not less. These matching federal funds from AmeriCorps Senior and US Department of Labor are already awarded to GECAC Area Agency on Aging through June 2025, but require a local match, which was expected to come from the Erie County funding.

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The impact of these budget cuts will have a detrimental impact on people all across Erie County. GECAC is speaking with one voice—representing seniors on fixed incomes, at-risk

youth, and parents trying to better their lives for their families—asking County Council to act decisively and return funding for GECAC’s services to older adults in the 2023 budget.

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