

Opinion: El Dorado County's senior legal ruse

By Larry Weitzman

In my last column, I wrote that Item 35 on the Board of Supervisors agenda set to be heard at 2pm on June 20 is set to terminate senior legal. In reading the agenda item there will be no county funding of senior legal. It will remain intact from current unspent donations of \$160,000, \$53,000 from a federal Older Americans Act grant and anticipated \$46,000 in continuing donations which should support the current program as stated in the agenda item itself "in order to fund and maintain the existing senior legal service program for approximately seven to eight months."

The point of the agenda item is to terminate county support for the senior legal program, no ifs, ands or buts.



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Paragraph 6 says, "Authorize the Human Resources Department to proceed with filling positions identified in the budget effective July 1, 2017." Sounds like new hiring to me. Maybe the spin doctor is being overworked and EDC needs to put out more propaganda to make the board and high-ranking EDC officials look good as they continue to do a poor job and make bad decisions.

Let me be blunt. The county's intent is to dismantle senior

legal and provide no county funding. When private donations run out so does senior legal. It is a ruse to placate the masses and to eliminate a service that provided valuable advice, information and protection to 2,000 seniors last year alone. Senior legal will be dead and many of our county seniors will be closer to death. It will potentially increase senior dependency on other county services and other governmental agencies.

This item is not a reprieve of senior legal. It's a slow death by torture. And without county support and the likelihood that senior legal will fold up, so will future donations.

As to the direction to create a delivery model, that too is a crock. We already know the director of HHSA is not the most competent person. The public will have little say and there still be no county support. One idea that has been floated is the underwater thought that the new attorney that was hired on May 1, 2017, (you know, the attorney that was actually fired before she was hired after quitting her law firm position and making a career change) be contracted with to provide services to seniors. It will take years to develop as government studies and commissions move at the speed of lava at room temperature and there is no guarantee that it will emulate our current and very successful program.

Former 25-year director for Human Services of EDC, John Litwinovich, and the creator of the senior legal program said, "My thinking is that the revised CAO recommendation is hardly a compromise at all. Rather, it is an effort to quickly end the county's commitment to fully support and provide senior legal services before most seniors have even had a chance to learn what is happening... Symbolically and painfully, the recommendation would mark a clear and significant first step in dismantling the county's Senior Continuum of Care ... The immediate termination of current and future General Fund support excludes today's senior legal program from even being an alternative to be considered... A better recommendation would

be for the board to maintain its current support level for the senior legal program and instruct the CAO to explore and report back on ways to save General Fund resources by reducing the very high overhead charged to Senior Programs since the Health and Human Services Agency was established.”

I wrote my supervisor, Mike Ranalli, as to what he thought of terminating county funding for senior legal. No answer.

Friends of Seniors in El Dorado County president, Kathi Lishman, and who is the person responsible for much of the donations, told *Lake Tahoe News* on June 18, “El Dorado County has a successful program with a proven track record. It is run extremely well at a very minimal cost. It is a model for other counties to follow, instead of them being a model for us. We are blessed with the senior services we have and are so proud of. We need to be celebrating the good things El Dorado County has created for seniors, instead of watching them be dismantled.”

You don't fix what isn't broken and in a vendetta against a certain individual within the county is going to cost thousands of seniors' anguish, pain and possibly sleepless nights. Old age is hard enough and it isn't for sissies, but our hardy and rapidly growing population of seniors still need plenty of help and the current senior legal program was to be the model for all other counties. No more.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.