

Opinion: Seniors get shaft in EDC budget

Updated 9:12am:

By Larry Weitzman

A day or two before the official release of the El Dorado County budget, informed sources have told this columnist that among the budget cuts will be the elimination of EDC's senior legal program, a program that is funded about 65 percent by the county, and by about 35 percent private donations and a small federal government grant.

This program provides direct legal services to seniors in landlord/tenant issues/estate questions/elder abuse/long-term care planning and protecting seniors from being taken advantage of. The service is now offered without charge. According to my sources, the entire senior legal staff will be cut.



Larry Weitzman

While there are rumored to be other large cuts in the EDC budget such as to the Community Development Agency, there are no positions cuts to the county administration. The county recently spent more than the entire senior legal staff budget in the hiring of a new county public information officer and filling the position of the assistant director of administration and finance for Health and Human Services.

The former mayor of Placerville and now the chair of Friends of Seniors, Kathi Lishman, said the following when learning of the elimination of senior legal: "I am shocked to hear about senior legal, as it seems to have come out of nowhere, and is quite alarming. The services they provide to EDC seniors are extremely important. Senior legal has received about \$95,000 in donations from the community in the past 12 months, and meets with about 2,000 clients a year. Some of the elderly are home bound or institutionalized.

"They also provide legal resources for adult protective services. The programs that provide direct service to clients are the first ones to have their budgets reduced or cut, while overhead costs to these programs continually go up, often due to increased administrative costs.

"The Board of Supervisors cannot make these cuts in a vacuum."

In a phone call with Board of Supervisors Chair Shiva Frentzen, she was also alarmed by the proposed complete cut of county support for senior legal. Frentzen says she does not want that to happen and it needs be examined further.

Former El Dorado County Community Services-Human Services director for 25 years (1982-2007), John Litwinovich, had the following to say of the proposed cuts: "At this point, I think adding administrative positions is a mistake. The costly creation of agency level administrative positions is the principal reason senior services are in jeopardy. Now is not the time to be dismantling the needed senior continuum of care prior boards developed over decades. Rather, it's time to reconsider administrative layers and positions that have been added in recent years, positions that have drawn resources away from service.

"Priority should be given to those county employees who directly serve the public, be they sheriff's deputies, road maintenance workers, front desk clerks, kitchen staff who

prepare meals for home bound seniors, or senior legal attorneys, on whom so many vulnerable elders depend. These and other direct service positions, rather than an ample administrative structure, constitute county government's *raison d'être*."

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.