



May 24, 2020

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
California Senate President Pro Tempore
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair
Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal
Review
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Joaquin Arambula, MD,
Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1 on
Health and Human Services
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Pan, MD, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee 3 on Health
and Human Services
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: OPPOSE ELIMINATION OF MSSP AND CBAS IN 2021 STATE BUDGET

Dear Honorable Members:

On behalf of the California Elder Justice Coalition (CEJC), a multidisciplinary network of 80 agencies, advocacy organizations, coalitions, and individuals, we thank you for your commitment to serving older adults. CEJC's mission is to provide a voice from the field on preventing elder abuse and upholding the rights of older Californians

We strongly urge you to oppose the elimination of the Multipurpose Senior Services Program (MSSP) and Community Based Adult Services (CBAS) Program. For over 40 years, MSSP has served the oldest, most frail, and most impoverished Californians and their family caregivers, so that these older Californians could stay out of nursing homes and remain living in their own homes. MSSP currently serves approximately 11,000 clients. The CBAS program is an essential health program that protects the very people who are most at risk of dying from COVID-19 due to their age and underlying medical conditions. In the first two months of the statewide shelter-in-place, social workers, nurses, and other CBAS health care staff have risen to the challenge of meeting the emergency needs of their 36,000 older clients with chronic medical conditions.

These staff have made 972,000 contacts to vulnerable older clients and an additional 73,000 contacts to the clients' caregivers, many of whom are older and disabled themselves. Staff from these CBAS sites have carried out more than 324,000 COVID-19 screenings over this same period.

Safety net services like MSSP and CBAS help to mitigate the dramatic disparities in older Americans' health and access to health care, many of which have been chillingly exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-existing conditions associated with COVID-19 infection and deaths -- including hypertension, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes -- disproportionately affect elders of color and the poor, the groups that these safety net programs were designed to serve. These conditions further increase older Californians' risk of developing other devastating illnesses like Alzheimer's disease and disabling conditions that can lead to social isolation, neglect, exploitation, and abuse. By promoting health and safety, identifying and responding to problems in their early stages, and assisting older and vulnerable adults to manage chronic conditions and access resources, CBAS and MSSP advance the goal of health equity and protect clients' right to live long and healthy lives.

These two programs save the State of California millions of dollars each year. Older adults enrolled in the MSSP program cost California at least 45% less than older adults who need nursing home care paid for by Medi-Cal. And nursing homes are exactly where many MSSP clients will be living should they no longer receive the supports provided by the MSSP program. The entire "savings" the State would reap by cutting the MSSP program would be immediately undone if 18% of current MSSP patients end up living in nursing homes.

The services provided by the MSSP and CBAS programs are more important than ever. One-third of COVID-19 deaths statewide (and half of COVID-19 deaths in Los Angeles County) have been in nursing homes. Keeping older adults at home is exactly what Governor Newsom has been encouraging us to do because home is the safest place for older adults to be right now. These two programs that are up for elimination have a proven track record at keeping older adults safe during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. MSSP sites around California have reported that of their clients tested for COVID-19, only 15 have tested positive for the virus and three have died from the virus. This is in stark contrast to the rates of infection seen in California's nursing homes.

We ask that you ensure these two vitally important programs are not shuttered permanently by these proposed cuts to the budget. Tens of thousands of lives hang in the balance. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact CEJC Steering Committee Member Shawna Reeves at 408-394-2154.

Sincerely,

California Elder Justice Coalition

CC: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor of the State of California
Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Dr. Brad Gilbert, Director, Department of Health Care Services

The Honorable Members California State Senate
The Honorable Members California Assembly