



OLDER MICHIGANIANS DAY

Save the Date!

Tuesday May 12, 2020

**Join us for a CONVERSATION
with your older constituents**

WHAT IS IT?

On May 12th over 1,000 of Michigan's older adults will rally on the lawn of the State Capitol to celebrate our growing senior population and consider policies and budget decisions that are senior friendly.

WHEN IS IT?

Tuesday May 12th from
10:30 am – 1:00 pm
South lawn-State Capitol Building
Lansing, MI

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For more information call **517-886-1029**
or email info@4ami.org

To see details of past events please
visit our website at:

www.oldermichiganiansday.com

*****A lunch ticket and platform issues pamphlet will
be distributed to Legislators by May 1st, 2020.
Please join us for this fabulous event!***

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Michigan Senior Volunteer Programs

HOUSE TESTIMONY

March 9, 2020

Senior Volunteers Save Lives

Representative Whiteford, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'd like to begin by telling you the impact volunteers have on the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens. As her mother was years ago, Laura is a home-bound senior who relies on volunteer drivers to bring her meals. She credits a volunteer driver with saving her mother's life. When there was no response at the door, the driver contacted the apartment manager to do a wellness check. Laura's mother had fallen and was lying on the floor for hours. Laura stated, *"we are so blessed to still have this program, now available to me. Knowing there is someone to count on is so precious in these times."*

We are speaking on behalf of the Senior Volunteer Programs of Michigan, which includes the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP), and Senior Companion Program (SCP). Michigan's Senior Volunteer programs are funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Aging and Adult Services Agency (AASA). The programs provide meaningful opportunities for older adults, age 55 and better, to engage in service in their local communities. Michigan is home to 20 Retired & Senior Volunteer Programs, 19 Foster Grandparent Programs, and 14 Senior Companion Programs. Together, we serve 70 of Michigan's 83 counties.

The **Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)**, one of the nation's largest volunteer efforts, engages volunteers in service to address community needs. Nearly 7,000 RSVP Volunteers contribute over 600,000 hours of service annually to organizations, projects, and communities across the state. RSVP volunteers do not receive a stipend and do not have an hourly requirement for their service.

Staff who manage RSVP programs work hard to coordinate volunteer efforts to ensure maximum impact based on the needs of a community. Volunteers serve in many ways ... some deliver meals, some provide respite for caregivers, some make phone calls to homebound persons, some provide non-emergency medical transportation. Although they serve in different capacities, they have a commonality... they are making a measurable impact on the communities in which they live.

Some services provided by volunteers address concerns of aging in place and allow elders to remain living independently, rather than being institutionalized. Some services benefit youth who are mentored and tutored to increase school readiness and academic achievement, as well as decrease negative social behaviors. Regardless of the activity, communities are strengthened by volunteers serving in many capacities and this is a benefit to the residents of the state.

Foster Grandparents are low-income older adults who provide one-on-one assistance to at-risk youth, with the purpose of improving self-esteem and supporting the child's ability to learn and succeed. Foster Grandparents commit an average of 20 hours per week to provide a stable, caring relationship for children who often come from chaotic environments. In exchange for their service, they receive a small, non-taxable stipend of \$2.65 per hour. In 2019, 1,087 Foster Grandparents supported over 6,085 children who were academically delayed, lacking self-esteem or motivation, experiencing behavior or social problems, and were at risk of dropping out of school, all of which can cause additional economic stress on our communities.

Senior Companions are low-income older adults who play an important role in supporting frail seniors and adults with disabilities in their quest to live independently for as long as possible. Senior Companion volunteers add richness to the lives of their clients, while providing access to their community, including grocery shopping, transportation to medical appointments, and opportunities for socialization. Senior Companions also receive a small, non-taxable stipend for their service. In 2019, 477 Senior Companions supported in-home and long-term care services for 3,583 Michigan citizens at risk of institutionalization. Senior Companions help seniors live independently in the communities where they choose to reside.

For more than 40 years, the Michigan Legislature has recognized the value and importance of one of our state's strongest resources, our senior volunteers and we thank you for the \$300,000 increase in 2018. The U.S. Congress has taken a page from your book and values our volunteer programs as well. It has allocated an additional \$420,000 to our national programs for 2020. Included in the appropriation, effective April 1st, the FGP/SCP stipend will increase 35 cents to \$3/hour!

We are excited the volunteers will receive this increase. Their last increase was an unfunded mandate of 10 cents 18 years ago. This has created a conundrum for our projects as 49 percent of our volunteers are state funded. To apply the \$3 stipend equally to all Michigan Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions, there will be a shortfall of almost \$300,000.

The greatest challenge is the lack of flexibility in implementing the \$3 stipend as the vast majority of projects are jointly funded by AASA and CNCS our federal funder. We can't very well say that only volunteers supported by federal funding will receive the increase and those supported by state funding will not. Without your help, our only remedy is to reduce the number of low-income volunteers we serve, which, in turn, greatly reduces the number of beneficiaries served by the volunteers.

If other solutions are not found, early estimates indicate a statewide reduction of 47 Foster Grandparents (who would serve 188 students) and 39 Senior Companions (who would serve 156 seniors) would be necessary. These numbers may seem small in the larger picture of the State's appropriations, but their impact is not!

An additional \$300,000 to the existing budget would be a direct benefit to the low-income seniors serving as Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions.

Testimony Provided By:

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