



At our June 11<sup>th</sup> Council on Aging meeting and through subsequent communications, we were made aware that the proposed FY2021 budget that will be coming up for a vote at next week's Town Meeting includes a \$14,000 reduction in the Public Services Wage line from what had been planned originally. It is our understanding that the reduction would be achieved by reducing the number of hours for the Director of Elder Services position from its planned (and we believe current) level of 35 hours to 28 hours.

**This letter is being sent to you on behalf of the Council on Aging to request an amendment that would increase the proposed Public Services Wage line to include the \$14,000 in question.**

As the statistics we hear on the news remind us each day, the elderly population is highly vulnerable to the risks of covid 19. The elderly (defined as those who are age 60+) are at risk not only of illness and/or death from the virus, but also from the consequences of social isolation. Studies have shown that social isolation can result in increased depression and anxiety, as well as cardiovascular, mental health, and other physical ailments. (See for example, an article from the National Institutes of Health to be found at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7104160/>).

According to the 2017 UMASS community needs assessment for Reading, approximately 21 percent of Reading residents are 60 years of age and older. This number is projected to increase almost 26 percent this year and 29 percent in 2030. To meet the needs of this population during the current covid 19 crisis, the responsibilities of our current Elder & Human Services department have expanded significantly to include phone contact with over 5,000 clients, delivery of masks to the elderly, and alternative food delivery programs. Our staff has done an excellent job, but the challenge of replacing the social interaction previously provided through the Pleasant Street Center via daily group meals, and a wide range of in-person social activities and classes remains very large. Moreover, we anticipate that the needs of Reading seniors will continue to increase going forward as seniors experience the ill-effects of self-isolation. Consequently, we believe that now is the time to maintain, if not increase, resources available to Elder & Human Services Department and the Pleasant Street Center.

The amendment to the Public Services Wage line we are requesting is critical to support the Senior population especially while the Pleasant Street Center is closed and perhaps at some point opening on a limited basis.

Thank you.

Thomas Procopio,

Chairperson Council on Aging