

# Transit cuts hurt most, senior citizen groups say

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

"Senior citizens are used to paying their bills. Then they eat," Sister Rachel Lambert told a joint committee on aging of the Michigan Legislature.

Her theme popped up repeatedly as 20 people from seven counties testified for three hours Monday in Livonia City Hall. If you cut the kind of senior citizen service, it has a domino impact on their entire lives.

The run, which works in a Monroe County senior citizens service, noted that despite increased bus fares, "rider-ship has held up. They (elderly) are getting the money from somewhere else."

Bella Cariappa, who works in the Outer-Wayne Area on Aging office, cited cuts in homemaker and home chore funds proposed by the Reagan administration, saying:

"This February we saw an increased demand for snow removal. So other programs will probably run out of money by mid-summer. A loss of any one service impacts on other services." And as for Reagan's idea that families should help the elderly more, Cariappa said, "Some of our clients are in their upper 80s and 90s. Their children are senior citizens, too. You can't expect them to shovel snow."

PURPOSE of the hearing was for state Rep. David Hollister, D-Lansing, to testify today before congressional budget committees on the impact of cuts already made, methods the elderly use to cope with cuts, and the possible impact of future cuts.

The joint committee consists of six senators and six representatives. Only three representatives — Sylvia Skrel, R-Livonia, James Hadden, R-Adrian, and Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak — and a staffer for Senate Majority Leader William Faust, D-Westland, sat all the way through. Even Hollister had to leave early.

Testimony was dominated by 17 persons who are on staffs of agencies on aging. Half of the 20 who spoke were senior citizens.

Explained Skrel: "We legislators hear the problems of senior citizens and read their letters every day. We needed to hear from the agencies."

Direct criticism of President Reagan was almost non-existent, though one speaker was applauded for saying, "Nancy Reagan says, 'Let 'em eat cake.' Well, there isn't any cake."

**PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** and Title V jobs for senior citizens were two of the most frequently-mentioned topics. This surprised Skrel, who had expected to hear housing complaints.

"The future of SEMTA is in great jeopardy," said Sandra Reminga of the six-county Area Agency on Aging. She said the recent 45 percent cut in large buses and 27 percent cut in small buses eliminated 500,000 senior citizen trips a year.

Clydie Frazer, an elderly Ann Arbor resident, said of the reduced dial-a-ride service: "We can't get it. And when we can, we wait four or five days. I'm a diabetic. When I have to go to the hospital, I call in (to DART), and I can't

get a bus, can't get a bus, can't get a bus."

MARGUERITE KANE, Royal Oak senior citizens coordinator, cited two of the 10,000-plus seniors in that city, many of whom receive telephone reassurance, home care, home repairs, recreation, income tax aid and transportation services.

Roy, 80, "lives on Social Security and has severe emphysema. The highlight of his day is when a volunteer takes him to a flea market."

"Mrs. Wilson, 76, is arthritic and 'virtually a prisoner in rooms three flights up. Both of her sons are unemployed. Without the services we provide, she would be institutionalized."

Referring to the home meals program, Ms. Kane said:

"We may have to make a choice — who gets a meal? Roy or Mrs. Wilson? This is choice I do not want to make."

"WE HAVE a nervous anticipation," said Shelton Tappes, of the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, as he zeroed in on job funds.

"Title V jobs are for people at or below the poverty level. Their incomes average \$300 a month. I know because I sign their checks."

"We have yet to be informed of what we will receive (from Washington) on July 1, 1982. Unfortunately, there are always more applicants than we can

service. We have 112 slots and 200 to 300 on the waiting list."

"There's a need to be served, and we cannot serve it when we're talking about reductions," said Tappes. Many of us wonder if Mr. Reagan understands. Serving the aging is an industry. It's not in the category of people looking for handouts, for alms. . . .

SOME 54,000 senior citizen aides are destined to lose their Title V jobs under the administration budget, said Kate Kaylor, also of the Royal Oak senior citizens center.

"I am supervisor of telephone reassurance. I have volunteers who will call 22, maybe 30 people a day. They're crippled. They're shut-ins. We've had a terrible hard time with the snow in February."

"We call it 'service with love,'" she said, adding, "I do need my job."

Lula Williams, chairperson of the Detroit Area on Aging Advisory Council, said, "Seniors have to choose between feeding themselves and paying for their prescriptions."

Randy Block, of the Oakland-Livingston Service Agency, said, "I appreciate the feelings of those who say, 'Will it be Mary, Bob or Joe who receives the meal?'"

Block focused on a dilemma in the home heating aid act: "If they (elderly) turn down the heat to 65 degrees and wear sweaters, they may lower their

home heating costs to less than 15 percent of their incomes, and thus become ineligible for home heating aid."

ELIZABETH LEWIS, project director for the Macomb County Council on Aging, told of a Mrs. A.M., 73, a widow who sold her home and used the \$7,000 profit to pay rent for a few years.

"There's nothing left. Her medical costs are \$80 a month. She is dying a slow death. She won't go to the doctor. 'Can't afford it,' she says."

Cuts in the homebound care program, Ms. Lewis said, "We used to respond to requests for the homebound in one to two days. Now we must evaluate each request. Some we don't get to for a week or two. To a homebound senior, that must seem like an eternity."

Robert Abar, one of the few persons not listing an organization affiliation,

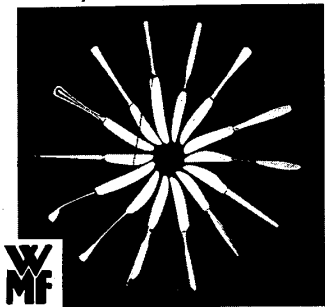
complained of property taxes going up 14 percent this year.

"I've been fortunate. But if this continues, we'll all be destitute," said Abar.

Arlene Irvine, executive director of the St. Clair County Council on Aging, cited an elderly woman who "must choose between shelter, food, utilities and health. She doesn't go to the doctor and skimps on medicine. Her needs won't cost much, and she'll cost more in a nursing home."

A different note was struck by the final speaker, Peggy Hinckley, director of the Ann Arbor Senior Citizens Guild, a United Way organization. "I'm from the old school. When we have all these programs, our seniors are worried to death about their taxes 'cause there's no way to give them for free."

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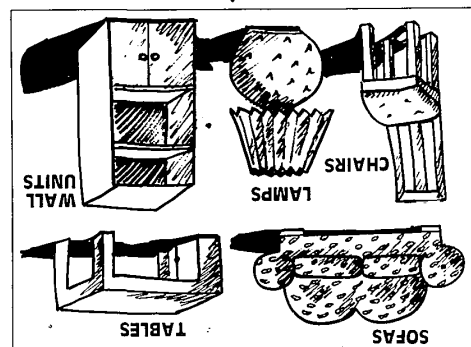
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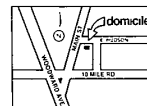
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