

Issues of aging, city aid going to public

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Budget cuts. Budget shifts. The aging. The communities.

The day's hottest political topics will be subjects of two public hearings next week, one by a legislative group, the other by the state administration.

At the heart of the arguments are these facts of life: First, the recession has cut state revenues. Second, the Reagan administration in Washington is determined, under the new federalism, to shift responsibilities for many domestic programs to the states — and some local officials don't like it.

THE PUBLIC hearings topics, their times and places are:

• Needs of the aging — 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, March 1, Livonia City Hall, Five Mile west of Farmington Road; Joint Committee on Aging of the Michigan Legislature. Rep. David Hollister, D-Lansing, said, "This will be an opportunity for a first-hand explanation of how older people are reacting to these changes in policy."

• Block grants — 1-5 p.m. Wednesday, March 3, Community Arts auditorium of the State Fairgrounds, Woodward south of Eight Mile, Detroit; Gov. Milliken's "Human Services Cabinet" consisting of the directors of Social Services, Labor, Public Health, Mental Health, Education, and Management and Budget.

THE MONDAY hearing on the aging is designed to elicit senior citizens' problems with Medicare, food stamps and senior center programs. "While we cannot predict the type of testimony we will receive," said Sen. John Hertel, D-Harper Woods, "I expect that we will hear from many seniors that they are simply unable to meet their basic food, health care and shelter needs."

The committee will accept both spoken and written testimony. The public will get a chance to speak

analysis

after an initial presentation from the Detroit Area Agency on Aging, which has been sending out its own announcements.

THE WEDNESDAY hearing will go to the heart of one of Reagan's new federalism proposals: the shift of administration of block grants from Washington to the states, consolidating 57 separate programs into nine new ones.

According to the announcement from Milliken's office:

"Michigan is taking part this year in seven of the nine block grants: alcohol, drug abuse and mental health; social services; maternal and child care; preventive health service; low income energy assistance; community services; and small cities community development."

"The state is expected to take on two others — education and primary health care — which take effect in the next fiscal year."

Comments may be spoken or written. In addition, written comments may be sent to: Sharon Willis, Michigan Dept. of Social Services, Box 30037 Lansing 48909.

LOCAL OFFICIALS are fearful at the prospect of shifting control of the simplified programs to the states. Many feel they had good luck dealing directly with Washington, D.C., and fear Lansing will be less sympathetic.

For example, Michael Glusac, executive director of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, said recently:

"Will the new federalism simply mean that dollars will flow only to the states, often stopping there in order to shore up faltering state

budgets?

"In Michigan, we have had a mixed experience. For a decade, we have had a governor who has been willing to listen and consult, often with mutually satisfactory results."

"But we have also experienced some parts of the state bureaucracy that are all too often insensitive where local officials and local governments are concerned."

A SIMILAR mistrust of Lansing appears in the Michigan Townships Association magazine. MTA fears the state may no longer distribute block grants for local government needs but use them for economic development.

In an article headlined "State Control of Block Grant May Eliminate Local Options," Larry Merrill, MTA's education director, writes:

"Thanks to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) small cities community development block grant program, many local governments in Michigan have solved a wide range of community needs."

He lists the needs as housing, water and sewer facilities, fire apparatus and new community buildings, and then adds:

"But now, with administration of the program being turned over to the states, Michigan's Department of Commerce is attempting to direct the primary use of the money away from local government in order to aid private businesses and industries."

The state's office of community development is housed in the Department of Commerce. The MTA article complains the director considers community "infrastructures" too numerous to be funded. Instead, in awarding up to 395 points to grant applications, the state agency intends to give 100 points to applications which will create the most jobs for the money spent.

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