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MEDIA CONTACT:

Catherine Edwards

Executive Director, MA4

573.619.6185

cedwards@ma4web.org

Missouri Seniors Alarmed By Proposed State Budget Cuts

Jefferson City, Mo. - The loss of long established programs that directly support Missouri seniors who are most in need are being considered by the Missouri House Budget Committee, chaired by Scott Fitzpatrick (R) - Shell Knob. The elimination of property tax credits that enable seniors to stay in their homes will be debated on Monday, March 6. Other targeted programs include a reduction in MORx benefits for low income seniors and significant changes in the level of care criteria to receive Medicaid for frail seniors and the disabled.

“We are alarmed by these proposed budgets cuts because they target the most financially insecure seniors in Missouri,” said Catherine Edwards, executive director of the Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging. “The cuts come at a time when we are struggling to keep funding in place to provide the most basic services for seniors who are living on the edge. We’re talking about food, medicine, housing and transportation. We consider these new cuts as drastic measures to balance the state budget by taking basic support away from a population that has given so much to Missouri, their families and their communities. They deserve to be able to lead out their lives in their homes, if possible, and be secure in the knowledge that we as Missourians have their backs when it comes to their health and well-being.”

About 240,000 Missourians received MORx benefits in 2016. MORx is the state’s official pharmacy assistance program for those in need and supplements Medicare (Part D) prescription drug benefits. The budget proposal under consideration would change eligibility requirements allowing only those who are on both Medicare and Medicaid to receive benefits. Approximately 60,000 seniors would lose their MORx benefits and be required to pay costly out-of-pocket charges for expensive medication.

The elimination of property tax credits in HB3 would reverse an established program that has allowed thousands of seniors and disabled persons to remain in their homes. About 100,706 low-income seniors and disabled persons who rent would lose the credit. An additional 91,505 who own their homes would likewise lose the credit, affecting a combined total of more than 192,000 Missourians. “We know that without this credit, seniors and disabled persons in every single Missouri city and town will lose a source

of income that keeps them in their homes, saving the taxpayers huge sums associated with state-sponsored institutional care. This is a case of being penny-wise and pound foolish,” said Edwards.

The Budget Committee will also consider changes in the criteria for Medicaid eligibility. It would increase the level of care points from 21 to 24 to qualify for benefits. If adopted, this new provision would affect Missouri’s most frail seniors and many disabled citizens.

“I think it’s important to put these cuts in context,” said Edwards. “Right now, we know that fully 400,000 of Missouri’s 1.2 million seniors rely on social security for 90 percent of their annual income. This means that for every three seniors who may cross your path during the day, one is struggling to meet the most basic needs. They are part of a growing population of Missouri’s hidden poor. They live on the financial edge. Some lost the bulk of their retirement accounts during the recession, others suffered catastrophic illnesses that drained their savings and some have simply lived longer than planned. There is no going back for them. They can’t wake up tomorrow morning and launch a new career or make those long-term investments that grow into nice nest eggs later on. This is real life.”

Edwards said the budget crisis presents an opportunity for Missourians to take a hard look at the programs that truly deliver the goods. “We know that every dollar invested in our senior programs saves the taxpayer money. We need to be supporting measures that will keep our seniors healthy and at home. It’s a wise investment and it’s the right thing to do.”

For more information, contact Catherine Edwards at cedwards@ma4web.org.

About The Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging (MA4)

The Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging (MA4) was founded in 1973 to serve as a statewide advocate and resource for older Missourians. MA4 is comprised of the state’s 10 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), which were created under the 1973 amendments to the Older American’s Act of 1965. For over 40 years, these local agencies have been providing vital services, programs and information to millions of Missourians and their caregivers, including legal services, home-delivered meals, disease prevention and health promotion, transportation, public benefits counseling, senior center services and activities and in-home services. The 10 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) provide a coordinated network of care in implementing statewide initiatives, which are designed to help older Missourians maintain their independence and give them a voice in articulating their concerns and changing needs.

As the official statewide association of these agencies, MA4 is dedicated to carrying out its mission of service, information and advocacy to improve the lives of older Missourians and to plan for the changes that will take place as the aging population grows in number and importance in the next decade.

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