

TESTIMONY

by REVEREND JOSEPH A. MULCRONE

Director, Catholic Office of the Deaf, Archdiocese of Chicago.

My name is Father Joseph Mulcrone, the Director of the Catholic Office of the Deaf, the Archdiocese of Chicago. Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns at this hearing. I am here specifically to report the impact on deaf senior citizens of recent budget decisions by the State of Illinois.

Starting in this budget year, the State of Illinois and other governmental agencies made a number of decisions that adversely targeted seniors. The single biggest one was the reduction of income limits, and therefore eligibility, for the Circuit Breaker, Illinois Cares RX program. These were coupled with the change the RTA made in eliminating the free rides for most seniors and people with disabilities. In and of themselves, these cuts made life more difficult for people who are on small, fixed incomes. For deaf seniors all this was exacerbated by funding cuts to agencies that specifically serve them, such as Centers for Independent Living throughout the state.

Then, couple these with the fact that there has been NO increase in Social Security payments for the last three years. However, each year the cost for the Medicare premiums has increased. In fact, what seniors receive from Social Security today is worth less than what they were receiving three years ago. All these have caused great stress in the lives of the people I see every week. Now, add one other consideration.

Do you shop for your groceries? Have you seen the cost of coffee, bread, and milk? These foods are staples for seniors. A cup of coffee with some milk; a piece of toast with some butter or jelly. You add these cost increases (and that of the gas it costs or the bus fare to get to the store) to the increases mandated by the State reductions, and you have a disaster.

I am not being dramatic when I say that for many deaf/hard of hearing seniors, what has happened in Illinois has created an endless round of...medicine?...food?...gas?...rent?...light bill? stress every month. I am not oblivious to the financial situation of this state and our country. However, the seniors I deal with are the people who worked hard, paid their taxes, tried to save their pennies, contributed to Social Security and Medicaid all their lives. A return to the income requirements prior to the reductions established this year would be a great benefit to many of these people, and a sign that at least some people in this State actually care about their lives.

Thank you.