

August 17, 2021

Re: The Urgent Need for Investments in Senior Services

Dear Measure X Community Advisory Board,

We implore you to consider investing in the needs of our county's older adults as you determine the sales tax distribution plan. For several decades, Contra Costa Senior Legal Services (CCSLS) has been helping low-income seniors with urgent legal issues. Seniors in our county are often on fixed incomes and highly vulnerable to evictions, rent increases, debt collection, and scams. Seniors cannot respond to such financial and life setbacks like most adults, since they often cannot increase their income through work. Many of the serious problems seniors face requires a legal solution, and yet low-income seniors cannot afford private legal representation.

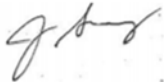
This means seniors are especially at-risk of homelessness and falling through the cracks. Too many older adults find themselves in highly stressful and even traumatic situations in their fragile states. Over 1,000 seniors approach us for help each year on average, demonstrating the extent of the problem and the large demand for legal assistance. With Covid restrictions easing, the need for help is on the rise. In recent months we have fielded about 80 calls per week. At that pace we would need to respond to 4,000 calls this year. Housing, either protecting affordable housing or defending against unlawful eviction, is the area with the greatest need. It is vital for each client given the high cost of housing in our County. Imagine trying to rent a safe, dignified home on a fixed income of less than \$1,800 per month.

We assist approximately 450 seniors with housing issues each year, on average. Elder abuse cases have jumped about 30% since the Coronavirus pandemic began, keeping our elder abuse attorney extremely busy with elder abuse restraining order filings and hearings. Scams targeting seniors are skyrocketing.

Our community partners and the new Master Plan on Aging have elaborated on the rapid growth of the senior population and the inadequate state of caregiving, transportation, housing placement services, and other supports for our dear seniors.

Mahatma Gandhi said: "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." We are measured by how we treat our elderly citizens. Now is the time and, if we make the right choices, future generations can look back at this as a groundbreaking moment for progress. The needs of our seniors are real, and we must do better. By putting this new funding toward improved care for our vulnerable seniors, we will take an important step towards a county we can all feel proud of.

Sincerely,



Jason Schwarz  
Executive Director