

February 2017

## State Budget, ACA Are Main Concerns At Legislative Breakfasts



*The February 6 Legislative Breakfast sponsored by Stickney Township and PLOWS Council on Aging*

Illinois' two-year budget impasse was the primary concern at AgeOptions' annual Legislative Breakfasts at suburban locations in January and February. A total of 249 people attended the five breakfasts, including 13 elected officials and 14 aides to federal and state officials.

AgeOptions, in partnership with community-based senior service agencies, convenes the annual breakfasts at which constituents and representatives of local agencies serving older adults share information with federal, state, county and local officials serving suburban Cook County.

This year's breakfasts were hosted by Aging Care Connections, South Suburban Senior Services of Catholic Charities, North Shore Senior Center, Stickney Township with PLOWS Council on Aging, and Kenneth Young Center with Catholic Charities Northwest and Palatine Township Senior Citizens Council.

Illinois has been without a budget for two years, and the state's stopgap spending plan expired on December 31. There may be no payments for services provided in 2017 unless the Governor and lawmakers pass a budget.

"In the bottom line, there are human lives at stake," State Representative Laura Fine said at the February 1 breakfast at North Shore Senior Center, as participants expressed concern about the effect on social service agencies.



*State Senator Daniel Biss speaks at the February 1 Legislative Breakfast at North Shore Senior Center*

On the subject of proposed budget compromises, several legislators were not encouraging about funding for social services. "As we fund things, you're always at the bottom," State Representative Scott Drury said at the February 1 breakfast. "We have done so many stopgap budgets and social services has always been the last one."

"There are elements of the (compromise) bill that will make it difficult for social service agencies to operate, too. This is a very difficult process and there's no easy answer," State Senator Bill Cunningham said at the February 6 breakfast at Louis S. Viverito Senior Center in Stickney Township.

"We haven't really resolved the underlying battle that got us to this moment," State Senator Daniel Biss said at the North Shore Senior Center breakfast. "What is the problem we're trying to solve? We should be sitting down and working on a budget."

Much of the discussions concerned what people can do in addition to taking part in town hall meetings, making phone calls and sending emails and letters to state senators, representatives and Governor Rauner.

"The people have not clearly articulated to us, the elected officials, what we want," State Representative Michelle Mussman said at the Kenneth Young Center breakfast.



*State Representative Michelle Mussman speaks at Kenneth Young Center*

"I think the one thing you can do is call your governor, too," said State Senator Cristina Castro at the February 10 breakfast at Kenneth Young Center. "Obviously we're here, we're listening to you, we

understand the importance of what's going on. I would say reach out to members of leadership. Reach out to the governor. What you need to do is keep advocating."

The threatened repeal of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, was another concern of those attending the breakfasts. Aides to U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Brad Schneider and Robin Kelly urged participants to relate stories of how the ACA has made a difference in peoples' lives, and to speak up for not repealing the act without an immediate and equivalent replacement.



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“If you have stories of people that have been helped by programs, you need to let your members of Congress know, likewise in the Illinois General Assembly,” Kris Sadur, aide to U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, said. “Jan will stand up on the House floor and read a story of a constituent that has been helped by programs.”

Karyn Davidman, aide to U.S. Representative Brad Schneider, agreed: “We are looking for stories, especially about the Affordable Care Act right now because Brad is going to be working to do whatever he can.”

**Legislators and aides taking part in the breakfasts were:**

State Representative Michael Zalewski, State Senator Daniel Biss, State Representative Laura Fine, State Representative Robyn Gabel, State Representative Emanuel “Chris” Welch, State Representative Scott Drury, State Senator Bill Cunningham, State Representative Silvana Tabares, State Senator Laura Murphy, State Senator Cristina Castro, State Representative David Harris, State Representative Elaine Nekritz and State Representative Michelle Mussman.

Aides represented Illinois House Republicans Leader Jim Durkin, Illinois Senate Republicans Leader Christine Radogno, U.S. Representative Robin Kelly, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, U.S. Representative Brad Schneider, State Senator Daniel Biss, U.S. Representative Dan Lipinski, State Representative Michael Zalewski, State Senator Michael Hastings, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, U.S. Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, State Senator Laura Murphy, State Representative Michelle Mussman and State Representative Tom Morrison.