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TOWN OF NEWINGTON

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Senior and Disabled Center



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Support for State Matching Grant Program for Elderly and Disabled Responsive Transportation (Municipal Grant Program)

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In 1999, the legislature enacted this grant program through C.G.S 13b-38bb in response to a review of elderly transportation services by the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. In 2006, seven years later, funding was finally appropriated. The Municipal Grant Program made \$5 million available to municipalities, apportioned by a formula. The funds required us to apply through a Regional Planning Organization or transit district. We were required to work with the RPO to make sure that the funds were used effectively. We are required to certify our maintenance of effort annually so that the funds cannot be used to supplant those our municipalities were already providing. This in itself is a challenge each year. The funding we receive cannot be more than 50% of our total Dial-A-Ride expenditures.

The program was deemed important 10 years ago. There should be no doubt that it is even more important now.

Among my colleagues in municipal services for older adults, I can emphatically, albeit anecdotally, assert that this program is vital. I can tell you what these funds mean to Newington.

We took the recommendation to coordinate efforts to heart. We connected with our neighbors in Rocky Hill and Wethersfield and created the Tri-Town Out of Town Medical Transportation program. Working with the contract that the Town of Wethersfield has with Logisticare, a transportation broker, for their traditional Dial-A-Ride program, we were able to purchase a block of rides. Each community gets a share of that block proportionate to their grant allocation (according to the formula, Newington can apply for \$35,584). As the lead agency, Wethersfield applies for and administers the grant and the contract with each community administering the day to day operation.

For the first year and a half of the program we were able to accommodate all reservations. With the rising demand in all three communities we have now had to limit the service. Newington can currently provide 152 one way rides per month. This translates into approximately 3 return trips

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per day. We turn people away almost every day. When we implemented the limits, we heard from our residents. They expressed their desperate need for this program. Not everyone has a family member who lives close enough or who has the job flexibility to take mom to the doctor. The fees charged by private transportation providers are not always within reach of older adults. Residents who use a wheelchair are not able to ask their neighbor for a ride. This program, while limited, is filling a significant gap. Newington can not offer this scope of service without the Tri-Town program and the Tri-Town program cannot exist without this funding.

It is my understanding that the program has expended between \$3.5 and \$4 million per year. The Governor's proposed budget reduces that amount to \$3 million. Any reduction in this program takes rides away from older adults and people with disabilities. In a time when we are very wisely encouraging home and community based long term care as an alternative to institutional long term care, we are limiting our ability to provide this basic service.

On behalf of my colleagues across the State and, most importantly, the older and disabled residents of Newington, I urge you to ensure that funding for this program is maintained in this budget.