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Advocates hail governor for helping elderly

Support services survive state budget cuts

Aging advocates are praising Gov. Brian Kemp for sparing Georgia's seniors from deep budget cuts for support services.

Kemp on Thursday unveiled a proposed state budget for the current year and next year that retains new funding for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) and Meals on Wheels, programs that allow older Georgians to maintain their independence and age in place.

“At a time when state departments are being asked to cut their budgets, we are so appreciative that Gov. Kemp is keeping support for seniors as a top priority,” Vicki Vaughn Johnson, chair of the Georgia Council on Aging, said. “Many seniors badly need these options, which have been shown to be far and away the most cost-effective way to help them age in place.”

Last year, the Governor and lawmakers added \$2 million to address an HCBS waiting list of 7,000 and added \$1.4 million to reduce a waiting list for the popular Meals-on-Wheels program. But over half of that money was on the chopping block because of state budget cuts.

The Georgia Council on Aging and the 1,000-plus member Coalition of Advocates for Georgia's Elderly (CO-AGE) are making funding for HCBS and financing of a Behavior Health and Housing program to help prevent eviction of older adults

from low-income housing their top budget priorities for the current legislative session.

Both budget priorities aim to keep adults from having to obtain more expensive levels of care unnecessarily as they age.

The costs to provide home and community-based care is about one-tenth of the state's cost of nursing home care, Johnson said.

CO-AGE has other 2020 legislative priorities including:

- Support for House Bill 511, a transportation bill that would pull together resources to help rural Georgians with mobility needs, including seniors who no longer drive.
- Support for affordable Senior Living housing options.
- Support for increased fines and sanctions for Personal Care Home licensure and code violations, and also greater transparency by the state in reporting these violations.

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Created in 1997, the Georgia Council on Aging advises the governor, General Assembly and state agencies on issues affecting Georgia seniors. The 20-member council advocates for aging Georgians and their families and makes recommendations to lawmakers and agencies on programs for seniors.

The Coalition of Advocates for Georgia's Elderly (CO-AGE) has been advocating for the needs of the state's elderly for more than 30 years and has more than 1,000 members, statewide.