

# 3 Major Unresolved Issues Facing the Senior Community

In May of 2008 the Senior Agenda Coalition collaborated with the RI Senior Center Directors Association in a State House rally to demand that the General Assembly oppose three cuts in the Governor's proposed budget: 1) 50% cuts in grants to senior centers; 2) elimination of free transportation for seniors to medical services and meal programs; and 3) elimination of twenty-one



community-based geriatric information specialist positions. Although hundreds of seniors filled the State House, lobbied their legislators and spoke out, our efforts failed.

Fast forward to April 10, 2017 when, thanks to our coalition of senior centers and other interested groups, we mobilized three hundred and twenty people for a Legislative Forum on Senior Issues. We invited as the only panelists the two legislators with the most power over the budget: Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello and Senate President Dominick Ruggerio. We shared our legislative priorities with them in advance.

Despite our advocacy efforts for the past nine years, regrettably our top three unfulfilled priorities remained nearly identical to those at the 2008 rally: 1) restore the 50 % cuts in grants to seniors centers made in 2008; 2) restore and fund RIPTA no-fare bus passes for 13,000 very poor seniors and persons living with disabilities, and 3) invest in major improvements in the state's information and referral system for seniors and persons living with disabilities. Our other priorities were increased funding for respite for seniors' caregiver, an expanded program to pay Medicare premiums for low-income seniors, and increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for residential and community-based senior services.

They knew that we expected them to respond, and they did. Speaker Mattiello opened by saying he understood the importance of "aging in the community." He told his story of caregiving for his aging father, a task he shared with his brother and sister for five years. Each sibling took a shift and their father was able to live at home during his fi-

nal years. The Speaker said "we're going to do something" about restoring the

President. As this column is being written, we have a meeting scheduled with

Resource Center, Smithfield Senior Center, and West Warwick Senior Cen-

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no-fare bus pass program. Responding to a question from the audience, he said he was "looking at" the program for paying Medicare premiums for low-income seniors. Senate President Ruggerio, newly-elected to his position, concurred with the Speaker's support for no-fare bus passes and promised to look closely at our entire agenda. We followed up the Forum by requesting meetings with the Speaker and Senate

Speaker Mattiello on May 24 and expect to meet soon with President Ruggerio.

We are grateful to the organizations that brought out people in numbers to the Forum: Alzheimer's Association of RI, Cranston Senior Center, Cumberland Senior Center, Johnston Senior Center, LeadingAge RI, Leon Mathieu Senior Center, Pilgrim Senior Center, RI Organizing Project, RI Partnership for Home Care, Sal Mancini

ter. With their continued support we look forward to making the Legislative Forum on Senior Issues an annual event, hopefully to advocate on other issues important to seniors.

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