



## **Editorial: State shuns elderly, poor, disabled**

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Unless emergency legislation is signed by the governor, an essential local nonprofit agency will close on Aug. 31, making it much more difficult for Napa County residents to care for elderly parents suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia, disabled spouses and developmentally challenged children.

That's because the governor vetoed legislation that would have kept open the doors of Adult Day Services, a nonprofit agency affiliated with Napa Valley Hospice that is licensed to serve Napa County's most vulnerable residents — the poor, frail, elderly and disabled.

The funding crisis begs the question: Is it the government's role to protect the safety of our least fortunate citizens? If so, the government is derelict.

If it's not government's role, whose is it?

One might argue philosophically about the level of government funding, but the crux of the immediate crisis caused by the governor's veto is in the bureaucratic catch-22 that without emergency legislation (with or without actual funding) ADS cannot even renew its state license and will have to close its doors to both MediCal and private-paying clients.

This makes no sense from a financial standpoint, because it shifts budget costs to far more expensive and far less effective alternatives; and that's before accounting for the social costs to the wage-earning capabilities and exhaustion of caretakers, or the cost in human dignity to the clients.

For example, Kevin Horowitz of St. Helena has been doing everything in his power to take care of his wife, Harriet Holliday, who is suffering from a brain disorder. Because he is able to pay ADS to care for his wife four days a week for \$76 per day, Kevin is able to keep working his construction job, and he's able to care for his spouse after hours and on weekends.

"I don't know how else to do it — these ladies at ADS help me," Horowitz told the Star editorial board on Monday. "I can't afford to pay both a caretaker and a mortgage."

So, if ADS closes, Horowitz said he will have to quit his job in order to care for his wife at home.

The option would be to place her in a nursing home at a cost of at least \$4,000 a month.

“Then I would end up on the dole — it would cost me enough to crush me,” Horowitz said.

The Star editorial board also heard Monday from St. Helena’s Dave Zumwalt, a longtime ADS volunteer, who said caregivers depend on the agency for support.

“Some folks just need a break,” he said. “If the governor had to take care of someone, he wouldn’t have done this.”

Bob Metheny of St. Helena, whose father attended ADS two days a week, said the service allowed him to continue to run his business “and I could remain productive, myself.”

St. Helena’s Anne McMinn, a volunteer who maintains an ADS horticultural therapy program, said her compassion is for the caregivers, most of whom are family members of clients.

“I can’t imagine pulling the rug out from under them, with nothing to maintain, much less improve, the health care of their loved ones,” she said.

Even though the governor’s veto was designed to cut funds to facilities licensed to serve MediCal patients, it also hurts non-MediCal people like Horowitz and his wife, who depend on ADS.

The governor’s veto will cost rather than save taxpayers money because alternatives to ADS are much more expensive.

In Napa County, for example, there is no plan for relocating the 65 people on MediCal who will have to find alternatives on Sept. 1 if ADS closes. Emergency service is more expensive, and the cost of placing MediCal clients in institutions is certainly going to cost taxpayers more than keeping ADS open.

Another cost will be the loss of caregivers, who are already overworked and underpaid. Currently, ADS provides caregivers with medical knowledge, social workers and counseling.

With fewer caregivers available, and only two nursing homes in Napa County accepting MediCal clients, elderly and disabled people with chronic ailments such as diabetes, hypertension, dementia, Parkinson’s and brain trauma will be desperate.

Only about 10 percent of ADS clients can walk independently, according to ADS Director Celine Regalia, who also spoke to the editorial board, along with agency CEO Linda Gibson, board chair Steve Silva and board member Tricia Williams.

Napa County’s two state representatives — Noreen Evans in the Senate and Michael Allen in the Assembly — are said to be sympathetic but the only way to allow ADS to stay open is through emergency legislation signed by Gov. Brown, the agency officials agreed.

A trailer bill will hopefully go to the governor this week that would allow ADS to stay open for non-MediCal clients like Horowitz and his wife.

Unfortunately, additional funding will still be needed to keep the ADS program open for all of its 115 clients.

“We’re all walking a very thin line, especially with our friends getting up in age,” said Horowitz.

Protecting society’s most vulnerable is one of government’s most basic functions, but one of the hardest-hit budget casualties because the poor, elderly and disabled have little political clout, he said.

Without government service to the poor and frail elderly, he said, “we might as well be primitive animals living in the jungle.”

What can you do? Write, call or e-mail Evans ([senator.evans@sen.ca.gov](mailto:senator.evans@sen.ca.gov), 916-651-4002) and Allen ([assemblymember.allen@asm.ca.gov](mailto:assemblymember.allen@asm.ca.gov), 916-319-2007) today. Tell them you want them to continue supporting emergency legislation passed that will save ADS from closure.

You may also contact Gov. Brown through the website [gov.ca.gov](http://gov.ca.gov) by filling out an e-mail form.

Also, please contact the ADS at 258-9080 or [info@nvhads.org](mailto:info@nvhads.org) if you would like to know more about how you can help.

(St. Helena Star editorials are the result of a collaborative effort among a group of six people called the Editorial Board. The board includes four St. Helena resident volunteers — Linda Reiff, Bill Savidge, John Ponte and Shannon Kuleto — along with Assistant Editor Dave Stoneberg and Publisher Doug Ernst.)