

Zaragoza: Adult day care centers should be a priority

By [John C. Zaragoza](#)

Posted June 11, 2011 at 2:04 p.m.

Re: your June 1 article, "In a fragile situation":

The article talks about Ms. Rosalinda Williamson, who is working two jobs to make ends meet. My heart goes out to Ms. Williamson, who relies on the services of Entre Amigos/Among Friends in Oxnard to take care of her elderly mother, Paula Lozano, five days a week.

I am very concerned about what would happen to Ms. Lozano, and the heartache it could cause to Ms. Williamson, if Among Friends is forced to shut down its operations due to state budget cuts.

I also am concerned about Mark Kovalik, the owner of Among Friends, and his staff of nurses and others who take care of the elderly. He runs an outstanding small business, serving the frail and some of those most in need of help in our community.

Mark's company employs about 65 people, including nurses, social workers, therapists, clerical and administrative employees, professional bus drivers and others. I am concerned about these honest, hard-working local people losing their jobs and the hardship it would cause for their families.

And there is a much larger picture here than Ms. Williamson and her mother, Mr. Kovalik, and the people employed at Entre Amigos.

There are about 37, 000 low-income seniors throughout the state who rely on adult day health care centers for their daily care. And there are thousands of families and family members who rely on adult day care health centers to take care of their elderly parents in a kind and humane fashion.

Ending these services would put a great stress on these families. Some might find skilled nursing facilities to take care of their elderly parents, but many would be placed with the burden of taking care of their elderly parents.

Ending this funding would also put thousands of people out of work in a time when unemployment in this state is very high, and it is a very difficult time to find a job.

The first of the three commitments I made when I ran for county supervisor was that I would focus my efforts on senior services. I have kept that commitment, and I will continue to do all that I can to help support seniors and the programs that benefit seniors in our communities.

But my commitment runs much broader than just supporting Ventura County senior programs. I am committed to supporting seniors throughout our state, so that they can find services that contribute to their health and well-being.

I know there are voices out there who say that the state budget must be cut to face the reality of reduced revenues. They say that the state has no choice; this is just one of many programs that must be eliminated to balance our budget.

I do not share in their arguments. First, half (\$85 million) of the funding for these programs can be provided through federal funds. This will require a waiver process, but the state of California has been successful in receiving waivers from the federal government in the past.

The state will be required to match the federal funds with \$85 million in state funds, bringing the total to \$170 million in funding annually to keep these essential senior service programs in place.

I know it will be a challenge for the state to allocate \$85 million for adult day health care services, but I see this as a matter of priorities. I believe legislators must find a way to pay for these essential services.

Perhaps they will need to find some additional revenue sources if additional revenue is what it takes to keep these and other essential services going.

Or perhaps there are other less essential programs that can be reduced or delayed while we make a commitment to fund this much-needed senior program.

Either way, I am committed to supporting our seniors, and specifically this program.

Several months ago, I sent a letter to our legislators in support of funding for adult day health care centers. My staff and I have also recently been in contact with the offices of local legislators. I now am asking for your help.

Please call or send a letter to your local state representative. First, let him or her know you support continuous, ongoing funding for adult day health care centers. Second, ask your legislator for his or her support for the state to obtain a federal waiver. The waiver would provide funding for these services, starting in about February of next year.

Finally, ask your legislator to support continuous, ongoing state funding to keep these essential services in place until federal funds become available in February.