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Commission on Aging Budget Testimony April 12, 2014
Bob Eiffert, Commission on Aging Member

Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council: Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Bob Eiffert, I live at 1418 Juliana Place, and I am here today representing myself, my partner and the Alexandria Commission on Aging. Jane King, the Chair of the Commission on Aging, will also speak immediately after me.

As you know, the Commission is very concerned about the proposed budget cuts to aging programs. The Commission voted to support the ½ cent tax rate increase to add revenue to protect programs for older adults.

I want to again address the proposed cut of \$1.3 million to Tax Relief for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities. The City Manager in Budget Memo #9 changed the calculation for the proposed program to establishing an eligibility threshold of \$575,000, *and that cap includes all assets plus the value of the home*. Four hundred (400) households would be cut from the program. That change will eliminate most single family homeowners, because even modest homes have values over \$500,000 in Alexandria. The map on page 4 of Budget Memo #9 shows the location of program beneficiaries. I suspect that virtually every home in the eastern half of the City would be eliminated, because the average assessment for a single family home in 2014 is just over \$677,000. Regardless of the value of the home, homeowners' cash incomes cannot support such a huge tax increase, and potentially affected homeowners *have not been notified*. Many are long time Alexandria residents who have contributed to the economy of the city. Alternatives such as reverse mortgages may already be in use for other critical, day-to-day living expenses, and income from a reverse mortgage must be reported as income for tax purposes. Finally, both Arlington and Fairfax Counties have tax relief programs equal to or more generous than the current City program. For all these reasons, the Commission also voted to oppose these cuts entirely and ask that the program be left as it is currently operated. Driving older homeowners out of the City is NOT a value that we share.

We are also very concerned about the proposed termination of JobLink's support for older job seekers. As Jane King noted at the budget public hearing, the New York Times recently described their job searches as so difficult as to be "brutal". Last spring, with the encouragement of Mayor Euille and Councilwoman Pepper, JobLink launched a special program to address this issue. Since then, the Older Worker Program has been working with 57 ongoing clients, of whom 29% have found permanent employment. This program enables these clients to remain in our community as contributing workers and tax-paying citizens.

The City Manager emphasizes the importance of services for older adults in the "Healthy and Thriving Residents" section of his budget message. We agree, and we urge you to raise the tax rate as you proposed and reject these cuts, in order to help keep Alexandria a "livable community for ALL ages."

Thank you.