

Response to Questions on the FY 2010 County's Line of Business & Schools Program Review Processes Fall 2008

Request By: Supervisor Gross

Question: Please provide additional information on the impact of reducing the number of days lunch is served at senior centers from 5 days per week to 4 days per week. Specifically, how many people will be impacted and how many individuals receive this as their only meal of the day?

Response: The Congregate Meals program of the Department of Family Services Fairfax Area Agency on Aging provides a nutritious lunch to eligible participants at senior centers, Adult Day Health Care centers and senior housing at 20 locations throughout the County. The Congregate Meal program serves more than 175,000 meals annually to 3,000 older adults. The goal of the program is to keep seniors, particularly those with low incomes, healthy and in their own homes. As one portion of the program, lunches are provided at the County's senior centers in collaboration with the Department of Community and Recreation Services. A contribution for the meal is expected, but is not required, because of federal funding restrictions in the Older Americans Act. At senior centers, health screenings, education and talks from a dietician are also provided.

As part of the FY 2010 Lines of Business (LOB) reduction options, the elimination of one lunch per week at the County's 14 senior centers that serve lunch five days a week has been proposed. This means that, on average, approximately 1,100 individuals will need to bring their own lunches on the day that lunch is not provided. However, this reduction impacts nearly 2,300 annual attendees, as there is influx and out flux from the program over the course of one year. This action may also reduce senior center attendance since the meal is a significant incentive for many individuals to attend the senior centers. This would then run contrary to the mission of senior services which is to engage older adults and keep them from becoming isolated.

According to the federal Older American Act guidelines, participants are not required to provide income or demographic data, thus the Department of Family Services does not have data on the number of individuals who receive this as their only meal of the day. However, the Department of Family Services does survey participants and based on the more than 1,900 individuals who have provided income data, 73.7 percent have family incomes less than \$20,000 per year. DFS staff is concerned that given the high percentage of individuals with low incomes participating in the program, this may be their only nutritious meal of the day.