



**AREA AGENCIES ON AGING ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN**  
**ASSOCIATE MEMBER NEWS**  
**Week of December 14, 2009**

*Title V senior jobs . . .* are the big winner in the FY 2010 federal budget finally approved for the Older Americans Act. The Senior Community Service Employment Program received a whopping 44% increase in funding, bringing total funding to \$825 million. Congress appropriated small increases to Title III-B Supportive Services (2%), Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals (1.5% each), and Title VI Native American nutrition (1.8%).

*The freezing death of a World War II veteran . . .* almost one year ago has led to new laws protecting vulnerable utility customers being signed by Governor Granholm this month. More bills are still pending. While shut off protections have been in place for many years for the state's regulated utilities (Consumers Energy, DTE, cooperatives), Michigan has 41 smaller municipal utilities that were not regulated by the state, until now. Marvin Schur, 93, was a customer of a municipal utility owned and operated by Bay City.

The bills enacted into law include House Bill 4386, House Bill 4650, House Bill 4655, House Bill 4658, House Bill 4673, Senate Bill 553, Senate Bill 554, and Senate Bill 557. The new laws require municipal utilities to: 1) make two attempts to contact delinquent customers and delay shut-offs for 10 days after notification; 2) create a complaint resolution process; 3) notify the state of a shutoff resulting in death or serious injury; 4) postpone shut-offs for customers who use medical equipment or have a medical emergency; and 5) make efforts to identify customers that are 65+. It also imposes new requirements on the Department of Human Services, namely to: 1) implement an electronic payment system with utility companies; and 2) share information with utilities about people that have applied for or are receiving public assistance so shut-offs can be prevented.

Neighbors found Schur dead on his bedroom floor on January 17 wearing a winter jacket over four layers of clothing. Windows were frosted and a water faucet had icicles. Four days earlier, the utility installed a "limiter" on the electric meter. \$1,000 in unpaid bills had accumulated over four months. The limiter blew like a fuse when usage passed a certain level – it could have been flipped back on with a switch located outside on the meter. A note was left on the door about the shut-off and the device, but Schur probably didn't see it. The company did not notify Schur face-to-face. Ironically, Schur had plenty of money and could have paid his bills but neglected to do so because of dementia. His family was not in the area to help him. Schur's family has filed a civil suit against Bay City and its municipal utility. A Bay City hospital was the sole beneficiary of Schur's \$600,000 estate.

*In other utility news . . .* Consumers Energy has just obtained state approval for a new shut-off protection program geared to low-income customers. The program offers more time to pay back utility bills as well as protection from shut-offs during the summer months. The new plan is open to customers with annual income up to 200% of the poverty level.

*Did You Know?* Michigan is receiving \$243 million in federal stimulus funding over the next three years to weatherize 30,000 homes of lower-income residents. For more information, contact your Community Action Agency.

*The Associate Member News is taking a two-week holiday break. Season's Greetings!*

© All rights reserved. Do not fax or copy without permission.