

Seniors Rally to Stop Entitlement Cuts

On November 9, 2011, over 40 of our Boston Senior Home Care staff joined the more than 2,000 elderly and disabled individuals and others at the Wang Center (in Boston) in a mass protest against proposed cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Sponsored by Mass Senior Action, AARP, Mass Home Care and several dozen elderly rights and labor groups, the full intent of the crowd's roaring energy and resounding chants of "Hands Off!" and "No Cuts!" was to send this clear message to members of the Congressional *Super Committee*, tasked with developing specific proposals to cut the federal deficit.

The November 9th turnout was described as historic, coming roughly two weeks before the Super Committee is scheduled to submit its findings to the full Congress. The rally began at the Wang Theatre, and was followed by a "rolling march" and caravan through Downtown Crossing towards the offices of Sen. John Kerry and Sen. Scott Brown near City Hall Plaza in Boston. Seniors took a large envelope stuffed with postcards from elders to the Boston office of U.S. Senator John Kerry, the only New England lawmaker on the 12-person Deficit Reduction Committee.

Max Richtman, head of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare told the crowd: "The threat to programs which touch the lives of virtually every American family, has never been as serious as it is right now. In Washington these days, cutting benefits to middle-class and poor Americans is seen by too many as a sign of courage rather than—what it truly is—misplaced priorities which continue to ask average Americans to pay for fiscal policies which for more than a decade have benefited the wealthy."

AARP Massachusetts State Director Deb Banda noted that "Medicare and Social Security aren't luxuries. They aren't fat to be trimmed. They are the backbone of support that allows older Americans to live with a modest level of dignity and peace of mind in retirement."

At the time of the rally, the Super Committee – a 12 member bipartisan group – is considering potential cuts to Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security that would harm today's seniors and workers – including: a \$112 billion cut to Social Security by changing how the Social Security cost of living adjustment (COLA) is calculated and reducing benefits; raising the age of Medicare eligibility from 65 to 67; and, increasing out-of-pocket costs for seniors in Medicare.

Rally organizers say these benefits represent an intergenerational commitment – and that cuts of the magnitude being considered by the Super Committee would constitute a betrayal of the seniors, veterans, and workers who have paid into the safety net and retirement systems for years. Social Security has not contributed one dime to the federal deficit, and cutting Medicare alone will not address the skyrocketing costs crippling the entire health care system.

Today, about one million Massachusetts residents rely on Social Security and Medicare. The average Social Security benefit for middle- and low- income Bay State Seniors is \$13,900, while their average out-of-pocket cost for health care is \$6,800.

Al Norman, Executive Director of Mass Home Care, closed down the Wang Rally by asking the crowd: "Do you know who we all are? We are the 99%! The richest 1% in

our county do not wait by the mailbox for their Social Security check to arrive. The richest 1% does not worry if they have a Medicare card in their wallet. And the richest 1% are the only people in America who don't need Medicaid to pay for a nursing home bed. But Social Security matters to the 99%. Medicare matters to the 99%, and Medicaid matters to the 99%."