



An Advocates Guide to the 2014 Legislative Session *The “February Session”*

1. Is this a regular session, a special session or something else in February?

Voters approved Oregon’s legislature moving into annual sessions in 2010. Because it was a change in the Oregon Constitution, this move required voter approval. As it was approved, the measure (Measure 71) calls for a 160-day session in the odd numbered years (long session) and a 35-day session in the even numbered years (short session). This passed with 67% voter approval. This will be the second “short session” since this change was approved. This session has all of the authority of a ‘long session’ – ability to introduce and pass bills and budget and appropriation authority. However, due to the short length of time, it was hoped that the short session would be able to take care of actions such as housekeeping bills, budget adjustments, and more non-controversial types of actions that could be vetted in such a short time period. It remains to be seen how that will prove out over time.

2. What will happen for Human Services and specifically for programs serving seniors and people with disabilities in the 2014 session?

The DHS budget, which holds the funds for services to seniors and people with disabilities, was determined during the 2013 ‘regular’ session. The 2014 session is an opportunity for the Legislature to make adjustments, for the Department to propose any changes they wish to see in this LAB – Legislatively Approved Budget – or budget reductions they may need to make due to rebalance or changes in caseload or any other issues. The Budget Co-Chairs have been clear that they are not interested in entertaining any cuts to programs or services for this biennium.

There are some unique elements to this February session that we haven’t seen in the past. They are:

Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA): During the Special Session that took place at the end of September 2013 and lasted into the first of October, there were changes made to Senior Medical Expense Deduction program. This program was revised to allow the impact to reach more middle and low-income seniors. From the changes enacted, savings are realized for state general funds that would be freed up due to less people utilizing this deduction. It was estimated that approximately \$82 million would be available in General Fund dollars from the revision for the current biennium. Approximately \$41 million was directed to go towards programs for seniors and \$40 million was sent to the General Fund for use in other programs. During the Special Session, about \$15 million was allocated to programs including Oregon Project Independence and Special Needs Transportation. \$26 million was ‘reserved’ in a Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA) to be appropriated during the February session for services and supports to seniors.

3. How will the SPA dollars be appropriated?

During the February session, the Ways & Means Committee will look at how to appropriate the \$26 million SPA that was set aside from the projected savings realized from changes in the Senior Medical Expense Deduction. There were some items that were named in the Legislative Fiscal overview of the

SPA (which you can read [HERE](#)), including Area Agencies on Aging, mental health programs for seniors and a backfill of the Quality Care Fund. Advocates and stakeholders for services and supports to seniors have come together to develop a proposal for the SPA. This proposal includes some key investments that are a priority for O4AD. These include:

- Oregon Project Independence: \$3 million to pilot the provision of OPI to younger people with disabilities.
- Supports and services to seniors: \$3.75 million through Older Americans Act and other Area Agency on Aging programs including nutrition, supportive services, chronic disease management, at the statewide level.
- Caregiver training: \$350,000 for enhanced access to statewide training
- Public Guardianship Program: \$925,000

Because the funds for the SPA have already been appropriated, it will then be up to the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services to determine the recommendation to come forward to the Full Committee on Ways & Means for approval and to the Budget Co-Chairs. O4AD worked with stakeholders to come up with a consensus approved proposal in order to strengthen the voice for seniors in this process and help guide the process with legislative leaders. This proposal has gone to Budget Chairs for their consideration and there will be hearings during February to discuss the Committee recommendations and what will go forward – just like any appropriation.

4. Are there legislative issues/policy issues that will be discussed in February?

Yes. While there are more limited restrictions on the number of bills that can be introduced by Legislators and Committees for February, there are a number of bills that are coming forward that will be of interest to senior and disability advocates. We are starting to hear about the issues that will be presented and do not have a full list yet – but some bills we know are coming include:

- Silver Alert Program Establishment
- Elder Abuse Task Force
- Home care for private pay clients
- Durable Medical Equipment pilot project
- Basic Health study
- Public Guardianship Pilot

5. What can I do as an advocate?

Oregon's system of long-term services and supports, which prioritizes the independence, dignity, choice and safety of Oregon's seniors and people with disabilities should not just be protected and preserved but also have investment made to reinstate the serious cuts that have been experienced over the last several biennium. The current proposals for investment in February have been considered "one-time" investments by legislators but these funding levels should be maintained as minimum levels for the next biennium. **Your voice needs to be heard by your legislators to know that services and seniors and people with disabilities are a PRIORITY – not just for one time funding but continuing investment.**

- Sign up today for o4ad's advocacy updates at www.o4ad.org.
- Schedule time to talk with your legislators about the importance of funding investments for services and supports to seniors and people with disabilities – including support of the Campaign's 2013 Special Appropriation Spending Priorities and investments in the Area Agencies on Aging, serving seniors statewide.
- Participate in the Campaign for Oregon's Seniors & People with Disabilities Day at the Capitol on February 5, 2014. You can learn more and register [HERE](#).

- Use O4AD's Political Action page to connect with your legislators. You can look up your legislator, send them email messages, and stay up to date on what's happening in the capitol. Visit today at: <http://capwiz.com/o4ad/home/>.
- Stay engaged! Connect with O4AD with questions or to talk about getting more involved with advocating on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities. Your voice counts!

Contact O4AD today! Email O4AD – info@o4ad.org or call us: 503-463-8692 to get involved. Your voice is critical as we work to protect and increase investments in services to seniors and people with disabilities. Our advocates are a critical voice for Oregon's seniors and people with disabilities.