

# State's older adult education programs must be saved

By Sen. Ted W. Lieu

California has a long and glorious history of providing educational opportunities to all segments of its population. Lately, however, this commitment to life-long learning has faltered, and we should all be concerned.

If a measure, known as Senate Bill 173, already approved by the Senate and pending in the Assembly, is signed into law by Gov. Brown, classes for older adults and health and safety education would no longer be funded. By comparison, the governor's revised budget calls for continuation of funding for older adult education for the next two years.

At a cost this year of about \$750 million in an overall budget of nearly \$91 billion, funding for these adult education programs is a small percentage for what we get. Medical professionals, including Dr. Gary Small of the UCLA Memory and Aging Research Center, have contacted me to re-enforce what his studies have shown: Keeping seniors physically and mentally active keeps them healthy.

By providing a community of peers, these programs also help ward off the isolation and loneliness that doctors say can lead to mental and physical deterioration.

Cutting adult education programming for seniors will ultimately increase costs to the state, especially in the area of mental health. Years of research studies in the American Journal of Epidemiology and the American Journal of Public Health demonstrate that attendance by seniors in the types of programs offered in noncredit education programs results in a significant reduction in the risk of contracting late-age dementia.

A well-known study, the Kungsholmen Project, followed 1,375 seniors over nine years and found that seniors who participated in physically, mentally, and socially stimulating activities contracted dementia at an 18-percent

lower rate than seniors who did not participate in such activities. (American Journal of Epidemiology, vol. 155, no. 12, June 15, 2002).

With California enjoying a structural surplus, it simply makes no sense to cut adult education programming. Even during the devastating budgetary years in the past, the Legislature decided these senior programs were important enough to not eliminate. It is incoherent policy to now end these programs when there's a surplus.

Seniors account for 11.7 percent of the state's current population of nearly 38 million. By 2030, one in every five Californians will be over age 65, says the Department of Aging.

About 3,200 of today's seniors are served at the Emeritus College in my district, with great success. Operating for the past 37 years as part of Santa Monica College, Emeritus is a model for educating and improving the lives of seniors, surely a worthy governmental goal. We need to preserve these types of programs as more and more Baby Boomers retire and look to the state for educational opportunities — and ways to be productive and contribute to society.

Older citizens are a vital and contributing part of their communities. Charities, museums and other nonprofits depend on their senior volunteers to keep operating. They are taxpayers and reliable voters who consistently support educational propositions such as Prop. 30, which promised to continue funding programs such as older adult education.

Seniors have already taken deep cuts in services. From reductions to in-home support services to the elimination of adult day healthcare centers, seniors have borne much of the brunt of the state's recession.

I urge everyone to sign my online petition at [www.senate.ca.gov/lieu](http://www.senate.ca.gov/lieu) to urge Gov. Brown and the Legislature to continue stable funding of older adult education programs and to eliminate the threat of reduced state-supported offerings presented by SB 173.

While the ultimate goal is to provide stable funding for older adult education, as well as K-12 programs and community colleges, keep in mind that the day will come when all of us may need to use, and likely benefit from, having an effective program educating older adults.

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Ted W. Lieu represents the more than 1 million residents of Senate District 28, which includes Santa Monica. For more, visit [www.senate.ca.gov/lieu](http://www.senate.ca.gov/lieu).

