



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 26, 2008**

## **Washtenaw County Older Michiganians Rally Will Bring Legislators and Seniors Together to Discuss Choices For Senior Independence**

Seniors Encouraged to Support Advocacy Platform that Seeks an “Everyone-Friendly” State

**Ann Arbor, MI** – Older adults, advocates, government officials and legislators across Washtenaw County will converge at St. Joseph Senior Health Building, Lower Level, on Monday, June 2, 2008 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. for the first Washtenaw County Older Michiganians Rally. Attendees will hear speeches, share opinions and ask questions focused on an Advocacy Platform that includes specific strategies and legislative calls to action. Collaborative sponsors for the event are the Blueprint for Aging, Senior Advocates of Washtenaw, and Area Agency on Aging 1-B.

A 2002 report from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments projects that Washtenaw County is at the beginning stage of sustained rapid growth in the number of older adults. Between 2000 and 2030, the 65-plus population in the County is projected to nearly triple in size. Seniors and advocates will use the rally’s Advocacy Platform to suggest ways local and state legislators can address the needs and challenges created by this growing demographic.

This year’s Advocacy Platform offers 2 strategies to make the state a desirable place to live and age-in-place, each accompanied by 6 specific actions for legislators to take to support the Platform’s goals.

**Strategy #1: Support Long Term Living and Care Options.** To pursue Strategy #1, legislators would leverage federal Medicaid funds for long term care options, increase state-funded home and community-based care choices, support programs that maintain and promote healthy living and provide significant support to caregivers, 80% of whom are unpaid family members.

**Strategy #2: Promote Livable Communities for All Ages.** To pursue Strategy # 2, legislators would make sure that local governments link with local aging leaders when pursuing development and economic planning, provide affordable housing options for older adults, enhance senior mobility options, provide greater access to health care and protect elders from abuse and financial exploitation.

Jill Kind, director of the Blueprint for Aging, notes, “We hear about the struggle from so many families committed to caring for loved ones. Whether it’s a spouse, a mother or a

neighbor who needs care, families are desperately looking for good, affordable community options—in housing, home care and health care—to keep seniors as healthy and independent as possible.”

Participants at the Older Michigianians Rally will meet one-on-one with their representatives to discuss the benefits older persons bring to the county and state, as well as to advocate for the adoption of new policies, additional funding and the implementation of new strategies to better leverage current resources. State legislators Representative Rebekah Warren, Senator Liz Brater, Housing Bureau for Seniors director, Carolyn Hastings, SAW member LuAnne Bullington and Washtenaw County Commissioner Barbara Levin Bergman will serve on a panel and answer questions from the audience.

Levin Bergman observes, “Seniors are a growing and powerful demographic that is going to need services. This county and community are going to have to plan to sustain our elderly in a humane way that allows us to continue to contribute.”

A statewide Older Michigianians Day Rally of more than 5000 senior advocates will take place on the steps of the State Capitol Building, Wednesday, June 11, 2008 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Tickets are required for the event. Seniors and advocates interested in attending the Washtenaw County or Lansing rally should contact Amy Smyth, Area Agency on Aging 1-B, at (800) 852-7795 or [asmith@aaa1b.com](mailto:asmith@aaa1b.com) for more information.

The Blueprint for Aging ([www.BlueprintForAging.org](http://www.BlueprintForAging.org)) is a collaborative of seniors, family members, and government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations working together to build community and improve the quality of life for older adults in Washtenaw County. The Blueprint is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Community Partnerships for Older Adults national initiative (CPFOA). CPFOA helps communities develop leadership, innovative solutions and options to meet the needs of older adults over the long term.

The Senior Advocates of Washtenaw is a nonpartisan group led by older adults. It works to organize and educate seniors, giving them the tools they need to make informed decisions and to advocate on public policy issues that affect their lives. For more information about the Senior Advocates of Washtenaw, call Amy Smyth at 248-213-0545 or email [asmith@aaa1b.com](mailto:asmith@aaa1b.com).

**For more information, contact:**

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