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Senior citizens to take legislative agenda to the State Capitol

More than 400 Bexar County senior citizens will attend "Senior Day at the Capitol," an organized effort to bring older Texans to Austin to meet with state legislators about their most pressing issues. The theme this year is "Seniors — the Heart of Texas." Local seniors will attend in support of legislation concerning guardianship funding, hands-free driving and payday lenders. The Feb. 17th trip is paid for entirely by corporate and civic donations.

"We want Bexar County seniors to have the largest delegation in the state in Austin on that day," said Gloria Arriaga, chairwoman of the City/County Joint Commission on Elderly Affairs. "With so many issues before the Legislature, the Commission picked three very succinct items to advocate for when we meet with our Bexar County legislators."

The delegation will express its support for reinstating grant funding for local guardianship and money management programs in the state Health and Human Services Commission budget. The 83rd Legislature deleted funding of \$250,000 per year that would have helped local guardianship programs which serve elderly and disabled Texans.

"Guardianship, and in particular the lack of available guardians, is a very important issue in Bexar County," Commissioner Paul Elizondo said. "To address this, Commissioners Court approved hiring three new staff positions to handle cases where there are no family members or friends able or willing to serve as a guardian. But it would be helpful to receive some level of support from the state on this issue."

The group also will seek support for regulation of the payday and auto title lending industry, which often employs predatory tactics that prey on seniors by charging exorbitant rates to borrow money. The proposal would limit the amount loaned to a percentage of the borrower's monthly gross income, more clearly identify fees and interest rates charged by lenders, and place specific limits on the total amount of loans offered to a consumer.

With the boom in traffic because of population growth in general and because of the Eagle Ford Shale, the delegation also will voice their support for House Bill 141, which proposes a statewide ban texting while driving.

The City/County Joint Commission on Elderly Affairs organizes the local effort each legislative session to secure donations to offset expenses for the trip, allowing seniors to attend free of charge. Eight buses have been provided through donations from elected officials, nonprofit organizations and businesses. Seniors over the age of 60 are encouraged to attend by registering online at www.aacog.com/seniorday, by e-mail at monicamartinez@bexar.org or by calling (210) 335-6918. The deadline to register is Feb. 11.

Buses will leave the following locations at 8 a.m. Feb. 17 and return by 3 p.m.:

- Alicia Trevino Lopez Senior Center, 8353 Culebra Road
- Claude Black Center, 2805 E. Commerce St.
- Lila Cockrell Apartments, 3500 Pleasanton Rd.
- Casa Helotes Senior Center, 12070 Leslie Rd., Helotes
- St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 4222 SW Loop 410
- Lion's Field Adult Center, 2908 Broadway
- Security Service Federal Credit Union parking lot, Rolling Oaks Mall, 6907 N. Loop 1604 E. (2 buses)

In addition to the Joint Commission, the sponsors of this year's trip include Commissioner Paul Elizondo, Sen. Carlos Uresti, Rep. Jose Menendez, Rep. Justin Rodriguez, Alamo Area Council of Governments, Security Services Federal Credit Union, Jefferson Outreach Services for Seniors, Port San Antonio, San Antonio Food Bank, San Antonio Housing Authority, Selrico Services, Walmart and WellMed.

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