Susan Sandberg, Councilmember At-Large and President of the Bloomington City Council

A number of constituent concerns have been pouring in this week regarding proposed cuts to the federal Community Services Block Grant program. In response, tonight I would like to appeal to the community to let us know what you think about these cuts. As many of you are aware, the US House of Representatives has proposed a 60% reduction in funding for the 2011 fiscal year. This will have consequences for our community. If you provide a service to low-income members of this community, and if you are in jeopardy of losing your funding due to the proposals for funding reductions in the 2011 budget, if you are about to close a program that provides immediate relief to those in need or provides longer-term services to those in chronically fragile conditions, we want to hear from you. We also want to hear from other people in the community who will be affected by these cuts.

In yesterday's H-T (Tuesday, February 15) we saw the headlines, "SCCAP programs to help poor on federal chopping block". As a long-time supporter of the South Central Community Action Program, I was quoted in that article expressing my grave concerns about this and a number of harms that will follow if there are immediate cuts to the current 2011 budget. Three years ago, this Council, through the Jack Hopkins Social Services funding, provided seed money for an anti-poverty program called the *Circles Initiative*. The program was brought forward by progressive leadership of the South Central Community Action Program and aims at nothing less than effecting long-lasting, community-wide social change to help people escape poverty. And it's working! The City's investment in the Circles program was made in good faith with City resources set aside for the support of local anti-poverty programs. If federal funds are no longer available to SCCAP, this program is in serious jeopardy.

So, good citizens of Bloomington…decisions are being made in Washington D.C., but the negative impacts of those decisions are very real and very immediate to our community. The pain does trickle down from the Hill, and Bloomington citizens are about to get hurt. I sincerely believe this City Council has an obligation to sound the alarm, and make sure this community and our good citizens are made aware of the intended and unintended consequence of this pending congressional action to cut funding to vital social services programs. A cut to vital social services will harm some of our community's most vulnerable residents. In a Safe and Civil Bloomington, that diminishes us all.

Tonight, I only speak for myself in my own voice as a community activist and current President of this Council. I hope more voices will be joining me in the coming weeks as we hear from more local agencies and service providers who will be forced to cut programs and services because of reductions to the Community Services Block Grants.

Following the H-T article yesterday, I have heard from a number of other agencies and service providers who raised additional concerns about what we may be about to lose in this community as a result of congressional decisions. I ask you to share your thoughts with us and with each other. Make a citizen comment during our public comment segments in tonight's meeting and others coming up this month and next. Email or call your City Council representative individually. Email us collectively at council@bloomington.in.gov. Contact the office of Representative Todd Young. Tell him what you think…and share with us what you know. Your feedback is critical, and we want to hear from you. Thank you for listening, and thank you in advance for your community action.