

Wiggins Co-authors Legislation Designed to Help Seniors

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State Sen. Patricia Wiggins, D-Santa Rosa, is co-author of legislation -- Assembly Bill 324 and Assembly Joint Resolution 4 -- that would use the **elder Economic Security Standard Index** (known as the **Elder Index**) to provide a better measure of poverty to plan for the needs of California's growing aging population.

Wiggins said that the **Elder Index** is "a new tool that accurately quantifies the annual cost of meeting basic needs for retired, older adults in each county."

Assemblyman Jim Beall, Jr. (D - San Jose) is the lead author of AB 324 and AJR 4. Senator Carol Liu (D - Pasadena) is principal co-author.

Wiggins said the measures are needed because policymakers are seeking a more accurate picture of what it really takes to make ends meet in today's economy. Lawmakers typically measure poverty and determine benefits eligibility using the federal poverty line, which is a 1963 measure based solely on the cost of a bare-bones food diet. Although it is updated annually using the Consumer Price Index, the 2008 poverty line is the same dollar amount -- \$10,400 for an individual living alone - - whether one lives in a high-cost market or a low-cost one.

As a result, the poverty line vastly understates the real number of people struggling to make ends meet -- leaving policymakers with unreliable data and poor planning tools.

"Many seniors fall through the cracks of this faulty system, with too much income to qualify for support, but not enough to cover their most basic human needs," Wiggins said.