June 27, 2025

To our fellow Americans,

The Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts are a beautiful, bucolic stretch of towns sparsely populated by single family homes sharing land with farms, rivers and rolling hills. The hills have been home to farmers, contractors, craftspeople, artists and do it yourselfers. In years past, local mills and small factories provided steady jobs. Today, many of those industries are gone. As a result, many Hilltown residents have found new vocations or retired, caring for their rural properties and in many cases volunteering on a committee to help support their local municipal government. Living and working in the Hilltowns is truly people helping people.

As the Director of the Hilltown Community Development Corporation over the past fifteen years, I have watched our population age and our younger residents leave in search of opportunities elsewhere. These demographic shifts mirror economic changes nationwide, but in small, rural towns like ours, the impact is more pronounced.

This is the most important indicator of our community’s needs. We identified this as a clear trend and have directed our organization accordingly.

We have expanded and prioritized our focus on supporting the needs of rural seniors to age in place, maintain their homes and have access to transportation for medical appointments and food. We have also built and rehabilitated several housing units for seniors to downsize and remain in their hometowns.

We are hearing concerns from seniors regarding proposed cuts to the federal budget, loss of services and unprecedented cuts to Medicare and Social Security. Many seniors, like my parents, rely on fixed incomes that they worked hard to secure to maintain their standard of living in retirement.

This was the deal we all made. We agreed to work hard and give the government a portion of our paychecks every week to fund Medicare, Social Security, etc. The federal government and Congress propose to make significant cuts to these programs and the Senate is now debating these cuts.

Seniors have every right to be scared and worried about these proposed cuts. That is exactly what seniors are telling us. In addition to Medicare and Social Security, the government proposes to cut HUD funding by 44%. These HUD cuts would leave many seniors unable to pay their mortgage or rent or afford necessary rehab to their home.

We often see proposals to reform, reduce or change various government programs when administrations change. These proposed changes usually come with a public comment period, allowing tax-payers to weigh in on proposed changes. It is our money the government uses to make these programs, so it only makes sense we would have some say in how they are designed. These public comments are not happening. We are not part of the process determining where our money is spent.

Older Americans feel they have no voice in these budget cuts and proposed changes.

There are rural communities all over this country with large senior populations who need our voices to be heard. In rural communities, we help each other. We keep our heads down and take care of business. We happily contribute to the larger society and we do not ask for recognition. We do expect to be respected by our federal government who made promises to us in return for our hard work. In rural communities, we grow the food, raise the livestock and protect our rivers and lakes for fish.

The proposed cuts to federal funding feel like a betrayal to hard working Americans and particularly our neighbors who are older and deserve to retire with dignity knowing they are secure in their home, that medical bills will be paid and there will be food on the table.

We will work together to raise the voices of our Hilltown seniors who are rightfully concerned about their livelihoods and ability to remain in the Hilltowns. I have asked my Hilltown colleagues to join me in signing this letter and to work together to protect our Hilltown seniors.

We are speaking up for every rural community across this country facing the same quiet emergency. We expect our government to keep its word.

We urge our elected officials to reject these cruel and short-sighted cuts. We invite community leaders, neighbors, and advocates to raise their voices with us. Together, we can make it clear: rural seniors are not invisible, and they will not be abandoned.

We simply cannot stand by while our own government takes hard earned dollars from our seniors.

Thank you,

Dave Christopolis

Dave Christopolis

Executive Director

Hilltown CDC

Allan Ouimet, LICSW-MA, LCSW-CT

Allan Ouimet

Executive Director

Highland Valley Elder Services

Marcia Estelle

 Marcia Estelle

President

Maples Senior Housing Board of Directors

Lisa Dana Berman-Goding, MS RD

Lisa Dana Berman-Goding

Executive Director

It Takes a Village

Stephen Philbrick

Stephen Philbrick

Minister

West Cummington Congregational Church