



# Opinion

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## Affirmative Action Decision Hypocritical

Kweisi Mfume, NAACP President and chief executive officer, said a federal judge's decision to strike down the University of Michigan law school's affirmative action plan is hypocritical because throughout the history of this country there has been affir-

mative action for various groups and individuals.

"Affirmative action has been enjoyed by various groups for three centuries as a lawful means of remedying present and past discrimination," said Mfume. "It is still the right thing to do to level

the playing field and a proven way to increase diversity."

Mfume said the NAACP would support the university's appeal of the ruling by U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman. "We agree with the university that affirmative action is critical to enhancing educa-

tional opportunity," said Mfume. Mfume said the attack on the University of Michigan law school's affirmative action program is only the latest attempt by right-wing conservatives to continue the inequities inherent in admissions policies that result in an

overwhelming number of white students being admitted and schools being less diverse in their student body.

"If it is necessary, we will join the University of Michigan law school in a fight to the Supreme Court on this case," said Mfume.

## Oregon Seniors Deserve More

By Keren Brown Wilson

Twenty years ago, I helped introduce the groundbreaking concept of assisted living to Oregon's long term care system. Our elderly citizens suddenly had the option of living in a place that felt like home, yet allowed them to receive personal care and nursing help when they needed it. The assisted living model became such a success that



Dr. Keren Brown Wilson

states across the country adopted it.

Unfortunately, seniors, and especially low-income seniors, may no longer be able to choose an assisted living facility as their home. Gov. John Kitzhaber has proposed drastic reductions in the Senior and Disabled Services Division (SDSD) budget for 2001-2003. These reductions to Oregon's long-term care system would effectively pull the rug out from under a system that's working, throwing us backward 20 years.

One particularly worrisome aspect of the Governor's proposal is its effect on low-income seniors.

SDSD budget cuts would be to make it nearly impossible for assisted living residences to accept Medicaid residents. Oregon low-income seniors who rely on Medicaid in order to reside in assisted living residences could face having to move out of their apartment homes and into shared-room nursing home facilities. Nursing home facilities are not the right place for seniors who do not need high levels of medical assistance. And, because nursing facilities are mandated to serve those needing skilled care, they cost the state considerably more money than assisted living residences.

Worse yet, if assisted living residences decide to continue serving Medicaid residents at the reduced payment levels, they would undoubtedly need to raise rates of private-pay residents to help cover the cost differences. With assisted living care already costly for seniors on a fixed income, this trickle down scenario is unacceptable. Such strategies ultimately cause private pay consumers to spend down to Medicaid eligibility levels faster than they otherwise would. Furthermore, as noted in an article published in the "Oregonian" on March 26, many assisted living residences financed with Oregon Housing bonds could be at risk of defaulting on their loans. Such defaults could result not only in the closure of the residence, but negatively impact the State's bond rating, which would mean unpleasant ramifications for taxpayers.

The bottom line is that these cuts eliminate seniors' options

for living with dignity. And the cuts will practically mandate that low-income elderly reside in nursing homes. In 1986, legislators made a decision that quality of life was a top priority for seniors, including low-income seniors. Now, in a tight budget year, it seems they've changed their minds.

While there's been a lot of talk about the importance of funding for our most vulnerable citizens - our children - are our frail seniors not just as vulnerable a population? It is disheartening to see Gov. Kitzhaber penalize Oregon elderly population in order to find money for primary education and early childhood programs. The larger question looms - must we pit the needs of one vulnerable community against another? Surely there is a better solution. Mark Simmons, speaker

of the Oregon House of Representatives, recently stated that one measure of a society is how well it treats its elders. I couldn't agree more.

Adopting Gov. Kitzhaber's proposal will not reflect well on Oregon's measure of the value of its citizens. Join me in telling legislators that, though there are difficult budget decisions to be made, cuts made at the expense of seniors are a compromise in

elder care we cannot support.

Keren Brown Wilson, Ph.D. is chair of the board of the Assisted Living Federation of America. She is also president of the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation, a private foundation that supports advocacy, research and training in long term care, and founder of Assisted Living Concepts, which operates 185 assisted living residences throughout the United States.

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