



July 31, 2023

Chairman Larry Baughn
201 North Vermilion Street
Second Floor
Danville, Illinois 61832

Dear Chairman Baughn,

I know the Vermilion County Board is acutely aware of how crucial it is that seniors and those with disabilities in our community are safe, healthy, and independent at home. Vermilion County is at its best when it extends a helping hand to make that happen for our considerable aging population. Right now, CRIS Rural Mass Transit is asking for just such help on behalf of our seniors.

Vermilion County is “top-heavy.” According to the 2021 ACS, 19.9% of our county is 65+, compared with 16.6% for all of Illinois. Also, 15.3% of our population are seniors who live in poverty, compared to 10% for the rest of the State. This means that over ten thousand of our neighbors are seniors who need the assistance of their community to accomplish the most basic things, such as making it to a doctor’s appointment or buying groceries.

CRIS Rural Mass Transit District helps seniors get to those doctor’s appointments and grocery stores, among other important destinations. We are the rural transit provider for Vermilion County; as such, we provide paratransit services for the Danville Mass Transit area, senior rides for the Danville area, and general public transportation services on a demand-response basis throughout Vermilion County, including a medical feeder service to Champaign County.

On that last item about the medical feeder service to Champaign County, it’s worth highlighting that this service makes it possible for Vermilion County seniors to access specialists and hospital services in Champaign County. Because of CRIS Rural Transit, seniors have more freedom and flexibility with which to make choices for their medical care.

Now, I’d like to ask for the help of the County Board to continue to provide these vital services.

We drive many seniors where they need to go. In 2022, CRIS RMTD provided 57,207 rides, covering 286,058 miles. We expect to exceed these numbers in 2023. Considering the population of our county, these numbers are extraordinary.

However, CRIS is experiencing rising costs of fuel and repairs to our fleet. Half of our fleet is at or the end their useful life, or soon will be.

IDOT does not expect to dispense new vehicles for another 18 months. With the exorbitant and near-exponential rise in costs of new buses, we are not guaranteed we will be granted the



number of vehicles we applied for. This past year, we made the difficult decision to retire two buses due to the high cost of repair. This reduction in our fleet limits the amount of rides we can provide to the residents of Vermilion County.

I want to go back to the matter of demographics before I close. In our county, 32% of the population and 63% of Danville's population reside within a census tract designated as either a historically disadvantaged community or an area of persistent poverty. The demographic groups below have been found to ride our transit more often than the general population:

- Over 65
- People Living with a Disability
- People Living Below the Poverty Line
- People Without Access to Cars

Our neighbors in these demographic groups will experience a greater struggle to meet their needs if our ubiquitous CRIS buses are not available to them. Especially for seniors with no support system, what alternatives can Vermilion County offer them if CRIS RMTD isn't able to meet their needs?

To my knowledge, there is no more cost-effective, humane, efficient solution than funding CRIS to continue serving our seniors.

I am asking today for \$150,000 in ARPA funds to help CRIS cover the cost of a new bus and to assist in the cost of fuel and repairs. The cost of a new bus has risen in the last few years from \$75,000 to \$120,000. Adding to our fleet and having funds to keep the other buses safely on the road will give CRIS the helping hand we need to give our seniors the seamless, dignified service they have grown to count on and expect.

On behalf of all our residents who took those 57,207 rides, I extend my gratitude for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nicole Dowling'.

Nicole Dowling
CEO, CRIS RMTD