



AGING IN THE 406

Summer - Fall 2025

Montana Steps Up for Seniors with Free Rides and Grocery Delivery

GoGoGrandparent Partnership Launches One of Nation's Most Comprehensive Service Programs for Older Adults

The State of Montana has partnered with GoGo to provide free transportation and prescription/grocery delivery services to seniors. Though GoGo has partnered with other states for transportation programs, the Montana program provides a broader array of services, making it a new model for other states to emulate. Customers access services by calling GoGo directly — no need for a smartphone or apps.

“Our goal in providing these services is to help older adults remain as independent



GoGo works with local transportation providers to provide services, screening drivers to help ensure they can meet the needs of older adults (Like being able to help with walkers or foldable wheelchairs). © Jota Buyinch Photo/Shutterstock

as possible in their homes,” said Kerrie Reidelbach, Director of the State Unit on Aging within the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS). “GoGo’s track record of serving older adults with care, safety, and dignity made them a natural partner.”

The federally funded program, organized in conjunction with DPHHS as well as local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), is available at no cost to residents 60 and over.

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**DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

Governor Gianforte, DPHHS Honor Montana Centenarians

Celebrating A Century of Wisdom, Resilience, and Montana Spirit



Helena centenarian Richard Blossom, middle, receives a framed certificate from Governor Greg Gianforte and First Lady Susan Gianforte during Tuesday's luncheon.

Montana centenarians were honored in Helena at the Great Northern Hotel during a special luncheon that was part of the Governor's 56th annual Conference on Aging with the theme "Flip the Script."

Governor Greg Gianforte attended the event to help welcome and celebrate five centenarians in attendance.

"This year, 21 Montanans have reached or surpassed the remarkable milestone of turning one hundred years young,"

Governor Gianforte said. "In honoring our centenarians, we celebrate their lives while remembering the history of our great state and nation."

DPHHS recently asked these individuals for their secret to longevity, the most amazing event in their life, a favorite quote, and various other insights into their lives. All who submitted their information this year will receive a recognition proclamation from Governor Gianforte.

The centenarians who responded to DPHHS include those who are or will turn age 100 by the end of 2025. The list includes:

- (1) 109-year-old
- (1) 105-year-old
- (1) 104-year-old
- (2) 103-year-olds
- (2) 102-year-olds
- (4) 101-year-olds
- (10) 100-year-olds

Meet A Few of Montana's Centenarians

Virginia Toews, age 100, Billings. In 1925, Virginia was born in McClusky, ND. A farmer, who would become her husband, proposed a move from North Dakota's brutal cold to Montana, promising she could go "anywhere in the world." She agreed, with one condition: "Not Montana." He convinced her to try it for six months, and though she resisted, they moved, and both fell in love with Big Sky Country.

Betty Stimac, age 100, Great Falls. Betty grew up on a farm south of Great Falls, where her childhood was filled with memories of visiting family and friends. Without a phone or car, she and her family would travel via horseback.

Richard Blossom, age 101, Helena. In 1943, Richard began his brave service in World War II. He served until 1945 as a paratrooper, sniper, and demolition expert. He recalls his first parachute jump from a C-47 with 12 other jumpers in Fort Benning, GA. Dropping from just 100 feet, the jump to the ground took only 30 seconds. After the war, Richard

returned home and built a successful 40-year career as a highway construction supervisor and part-owner of Hilde Construction Company.

Dorothy Santala, age 102, Billings.

Dorothy said her philosophy on longevity is "there is no secret, it just happens if you're lucky." And, her guiding principle is a simple yet profound truth. "Take life as it comes," she said.

Mickael Teig, age 109, Lebo. When Mickael was younger, the Lebo Post Office was operated out of the family home. He was the eighth of 11 children, and all were born on the family farm. When he was 100, he taught himself to play the violin.

In addition to the luncheon, the conference provides valuable information about services and supports that affect the well-being of older Montanans, their loved ones, and their caregivers.

This year's conference offered an excellent opportunity to explore the aspects of aging in Montana. Participants delved into the latest research, innovative programs, and practical strategies that help shape the experience of older adults in Montana. Breakout sessions and panel discussions explored topics such as aging in place, disaster prevention, and best practices for good mental health.

Additional conference information can be found on the [Governor's Conference on Aging](https://governorsconferenceonaging.mt.gov) website (GovernorsConferenceonAging.mt.gov)

Montana's Movement Toward Inclusive Care

Celebrating the ADA and Honoring Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson

*By Molly Kimmel, Director of the Rural
Institute for Inclusive Communities, UM*

My favorite lesser-known holiday happened on July 26, when we celebrated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) becoming law. This landmark legislation, signed by George H.W. Bush in 1990, prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities while working to ensure people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

One of the ADA's five mandates requires states provide community-based services and care for people with disabilities whenever possible. This was upheld in a pivotal Supreme Court decision brought forward by Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson, two women in Georgia with developmental and mental health disabilities. Both spent significant time institutionalized before suing Tommy Olmstead, the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Human Resources, for the right to live in their community of choice.

In 1999, the Supreme Court ruled that, under Title II of the ADA, Lois and Elaine could not be forced to live in an institution if they could receive care in a more integrated setting in the community. Through tireless advocacy and the



The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed in 1990, bans discrimination to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities. © Jack the Sparrow/Shutterstock

bravery of these two women, states are now required to implement an "Olmstead Plan" (or Curtis/Wilson plan as we call it to honor Lois and Elaine) with specific goals and objectives dedicated to effectively serving people with disabilities in their communities of choice.

Here at the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities, Montana's University Center of Excellence in Developmental and related Disabilities, we are superfans of the ADA. Our mission is to build access and opportunity for people with disabilities through research, evaluation, service, and training. So, we were thrilled when DPHHS asked us to help facilitate the development of a new and improved Curtis/Wilson Plan for Montana. Check out our progress to date on our [website](https://umt.edu/rural-institute/posts/2024/olmstead-plan.php) (umt.edu/rural-institute/posts/2024/olmstead-plan.php) and look

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Lindsey Carter, SLTCD Administrator

Stewardship, Service, and the Road Ahead for the Aging Services Bureau

Montana's Aging Services Bureau (ASB) is built on a tradition of dedicated leadership, and I want to take a moment to reflect on an upcoming transition that marks both an end and a new beginning.

ASB is undergoing a leadership transition. Kerrie Reidelbach, the current bureau chief, will be retiring this fall, with her last day expected to be October 3. Tessa Bailey stepped into the role of interim bureau chief, effective September 1.

Honoring Kerrie Reidelbach's Decades of Service

It's hard to fully capture Kerrie Reidelbach's impact, but here's a start. She has dedicated her entire career to serving individuals with disabilities and older Montanans, spending nearly 15 years with the Senior and Long-Term Care Division (SLTCD). She initially joined as the Aging and Disability Resource Center coordinator, but, approximately

eight years ago, Kerrie was promoted to ASB bureau chief.

During her tenure as ASB chief, Kerrie spearheaded efforts to ensure equity and transparency with the Older Americans Act (OOA) funding formula. She also effectively managed the downsizing of Montana's AAAs from 10 to nine and has recently focused on ensuring Montana's compliance with new OOA regulations.

Beyond these significant achievements, Kerrie has been instrumental in expanding caregiver supports and building strong relationships within the AAA network. She also substantially improved the Bureau's monitoring and compliance with OOA regulatory requirements, leaving a lasting positive impact on services provided to Montanans.

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Confidence Crimes

The Pitch Is Perfect — The Pain Real



AI can clone voices. In grandparent scams, scammers may clone the voice of a grandchild to deliver a seemingly foolproof pitch. ©Dima Berlin/Shutterstock

By Alex Ward, AARP Lead Volunteer for American Indian Outreach

For the past 30 years I have been providing training for the public and law enforcement regarding fraud and its impact on everyone. Many people underestimate the professionalism of cons. And con doesn't stand for convict — what it stands for is confidence game.

Today's cons are very sophisticated, and it almost isn't worth talking about the various scams, because as soon as we start, 10 more scams appear, as if by magic. What is helpful, however, is discussing the red flags that help us determine whether we are being defrauded.

Getting Personal

One major red flag arises when a stranger calls and begins asking personal

questions we should never answer. Hang up and stop talking as soon as you realize it's a scam. I know, we often feel we are smarter than the con, but hear me now — we are not. Cons spend hours each day perfecting their pitches and are much better at pushing for a close than we are at preventing it.

AI for the Perfect Crime

We now recognize these bad actors are using artificial intelligence to thwart our strongest defenses. AI can be deployed in many ways, the simplest being to let it control the pitch. When that happens, AI writes the pitch to be more perfect than a person could create. It introduces just enough mistakes for the average person to move on, but keeps the less savvy viewer engaged. That guarantees the con reaches the person most likely to fall for it.

AI can also clone voices. In grandparent scams, scammers may clone the voice of a grandchild to deliver a seemingly foolproof pitch. That's why it's important for grandparents and grandchildren to have a code word they can — something known only to them — to confirm the caller is truly who they claim to be.

Caller ID Can Lie

AI isn't the only thing that can make it easy for the con to be successful with the pitch. Cons can manipulate your phones, so when you look at your caller ID, it tells you what they want you to see.

For example, if you get a call from the IRS, and they say you owe back taxes and must pay them over the phone, don't fall for it. IRS and other federal agencies do not collect taxes over the phone, no matter what your caller ID tells you.

Not All Money Is Equal

One other tip — don't send money to a con using an unusual method of payment. Gift

cards, Bitcoin, money grams, etc. are not safe ways to pay for anything.

Also remember, Bitcoin is considered a security, not traditional cash. That means it behaves more like an investment asset — similar to stocks or bonds — rather than money you can actually spend. If you don't fully understand how Bitcoin works, especially how its value can fluctuate or how to store it safely, you're at serious risk of losing your investment.

Clocking Your Confidence

Finally, don't assume that talking longer will help you outsmart a scammer. Doesn't happen. They are professionals, and the longer the conversation, the more likely you will fall for the pitch. They keep track of how long they keep you on the phone, which alone guarantees you will get more calls.

Best advice: If you don't recognize the number, don't pick up.

GoGoGrandparent continued from page 1

"Baby Boomers are nearly all seniors now, and people are living longer. We're also seeing family sizes shrink, which narrows the pool of potential unpaid family caregivers," said GoGoGrandparent co-founder and CEO Justin Boogaard. "States like Montana are stepping up to fill the gap with GoGo's services. We're proud to be working with Montana on this important initiative."

GoGo operators also monitor rides en route and will proactively contact drivers

and/or riders should any issues or questions arise.

The program launched in Yellowstone and Fergus counties in August 2024, and later expanded to Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, Gallatin, Silver Bow, and Jefferson counties. In 2025, monthly ride volume reached over 900 in May and 870 in June. To learn more about Montana's program, visit gogograndparent.com/mtinfo



TCARE Empowering Montana Caregivers

A Tailored Approach to Preventing Burnout



Across Montana, a dedicated network of family caregivers silently shoulders immense responsibility, providing needed support for their loved ones. While their commitment is unwavering, the journey often takes a heavy toll.

Recognizing Need for Caregiver Support

Caregivers in our communities often face emotional and physical exhaustion from managing complex needs, dealing with financial stresses, and struggling with feelings of isolation. This strain can severely impact their mental and physical well-being, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and depression as they strive to balance caregiving with personal and professional demands.

In a state where geography and access to resources present real challenges, the need for meaningful and timely support is clear.

A New Tool for Montana's Caregivers

To help address this need, AAAs in planning and service areas IV, VI, VII, and VIII are partnering under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) grant to introduce a new tool designed to support caregivers:

the Tailored Caregiver Assessment and Referral (TCARE) program.

Understanding TCARE's Approach

TCARE is an evidence-based tool developed to address caregiver distress. Its patented approach focuses on identity discrepancy — the conflict that arises when personal roles, such as spouse, sibling, or child, clash with the demands of caregiving. Research indicates this internal tension, more than workload alone, is a key contributor to burnout.

By addressing this fundamental disconnect, TCARE offers a unique and powerful pathway to resilience.

Supporting Caregivers with Individualized Planning

Local AAA staff were trained in the TCARE program in December and have since been actively engaging with caregivers across the region. These compassionate professionals guide caregivers through a comprehensive assessment process. During assessment sessions lasting 40 to 60 minutes, conducted in person or by phone, they explore various aspects of the caregiver's life, including caregiving

duration, personal obligations, and their own physical and emotional health. Information about the care recipient's needs is also carefully documented.

Building Sustainable Care Through Collaboration

The data from this assessment is then integrated into TCARE's intelligent web-based software. Using advanced decision algorithms, the system creates a highly personalized care plan. This plan identifies specific intervention goals and strategies, recommending customized services from a broad catalog of options. These recommendations, which can include respite care, local programs, or counseling, are uniquely tailored to the caregiver's needs, preferences, and availability. The care manager then works with the caregiver, discussing the findings and ensuring they feel fully empowered to select the services that will best support their well-being. This dynamic planning process is reviewed every three to six months to adapt to changing needs, ensuring ongoing, relevant support.

Investing in Montana's Caregiving Future

This initiative represents a strategic investment in the well-being of caregivers in Montana. For our local agencies that are struggling with limited funding and staffing, TCARE offers a powerful, outcome-driven solution. It enables us to proactively identify and reduce burnout, ensure appropriate service utilization, and ultimately help more Montanans receive care in the comfort of their own homes, thereby reducing the strain on institutional resources.

Through TCARE, we are not just addressing the symptoms of burnout; we are fundamentally empowering caregivers to sustain their indispensable roles and improve their quality of life.

For more information contact Tessa Bailly at (406) 444-6061 or Tessa.Bailly@mt.gov



NEED HELP WITH SENIOR SERVICES?

Area Agencies on Aging offer guidance on health-care, Medicaid, Medicare, nutrition, and other essential services for elder adults. Contact your local agency for personalized support and resources.

Area I - Glendive Area
(406) 377-3564

Area II - Roundup Area
(406) 323-1320

Area III - Conrad Area
(406) 271-7553

Area IV - Helena Area
(406) 447-1680

Area V - Butte Area
(406) 782-5555

Area VI - Polson Area
(406) 883-7284

Area VII - Missoula Area
(406) 728-7682

Area VIII - Great Falls Area
(406) 454-6990

Area IV - Kalispell Area
(406) 758-5730

More Reports, Stronger Responses

Montana's Efforts to Confront Elder Abuse

Montana's aging population is growing — and so are the threats against it. From financial exploitation to neglect by trusted caregivers, elder abuse remains an increasingly urgent issue requiring coordinated action from state agencies, lawmakers, and communities.

The scope of abuse has escalated in recent years. In 2021, nearly 4,900 Montanans were documented as victims. By 2022, Adult Protective Services (APS) referrals rose 18%, reaching more than 11,500 cases. In 2024, allegations jumped to over 14,000, with roughly 3,000 involving financial exploitation. APS referred about 300 cases for prosecution.

Not every case leads to criminal charges, but some recent convictions — like one that ended in a 17-year prison sentence — show that serious abuse cases can lead to strong consequences.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD)

On June 15, 2025, Montana joined the global observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Events across the state highlighted the importance of early intervention and public awareness, with support from APS, the Department of Justice's Elder Justice Unit, and regional Elder Justice Councils. Residents were encouraged to report suspected abuse

and learn how to recognize the signs — reinforcing public engagement as central to Montana's protective infrastructure.

Serving Adults with Disabilities and Complex Needs

As one in four Montanans is projected to be age 65 or older by 2030, outreach efforts continue to expand for individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities. The Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST), based in the Montana State Auditor's Office, is a key partner in these efforts. FAST reviews financial exploitation cases within 72 hours and works with institutions, regulators, and law enforcement to coordinate timely intervention.

2025 Legislative Highlights

Several bills passed in the 2025 legislative session build momentum for stronger protections and clearer accountability:

- **HB 532:** Strengthens Montana's criminal statutes to better address abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults and incapacitated persons. It clarifies key definitions — including "neglect" and "personal degradation" — and introduces felony penalties of up to 10 years in prison and \$10,000 in fines. It also increases penalties for identity theft involving vulnerable individuals, making elder abuse crimes easier to charge and prosecute.

- **HB 743:** Establishes formal reporting requirements for elder exploitation cases. APS must forward credible reports to county attorneys, who are now required to submit annual case data — including charges and sentencing details — to the Attorney General. The Attorney General may request findings for cases declined for prosecution and will report statewide trends to lawmakers. These provisions add transparency and oversight.

- **HB 825:** Updates Montana’s health care proxy laws by introducing the “trusted decisionmaker” designation. Patients may identify someone to make medical decisions if they lose capacity. The bill creates a clear decision-making hierarchy and updates the patient bill of rights to strengthen autonomy and clarity in medical emergencies.

- **HJ 26:** Authorizes a study of Montana’s guardianship and conservatorship systems, with recommendations due to the 2026 Legislature.

- **SB 296 (Alan’s Law):** Increases penalties for offenses against vulnerable persons committed by individuals working or volunteering in caregiving roles. It applies broadly to facilities serving both adults and children.

- **Guardianship Support:** APS received budget funding for targeted service enhancements. The 2025 budget provided three permanent staff positions to continue the current 75 state-appointed guardianships.

Looking Ahead

Elder abuse — especially financial exploitation — is often concealed by fear, shame, and isolation. Montana’s recent legislative and programmatic changes reflect meaningful progress, but lasting protection requires ongoing awareness and shared responsibility.

By staying informed and engaged, Montanans can help ensure that aging is met not with vulnerability, but with dignity, safety, and respect.

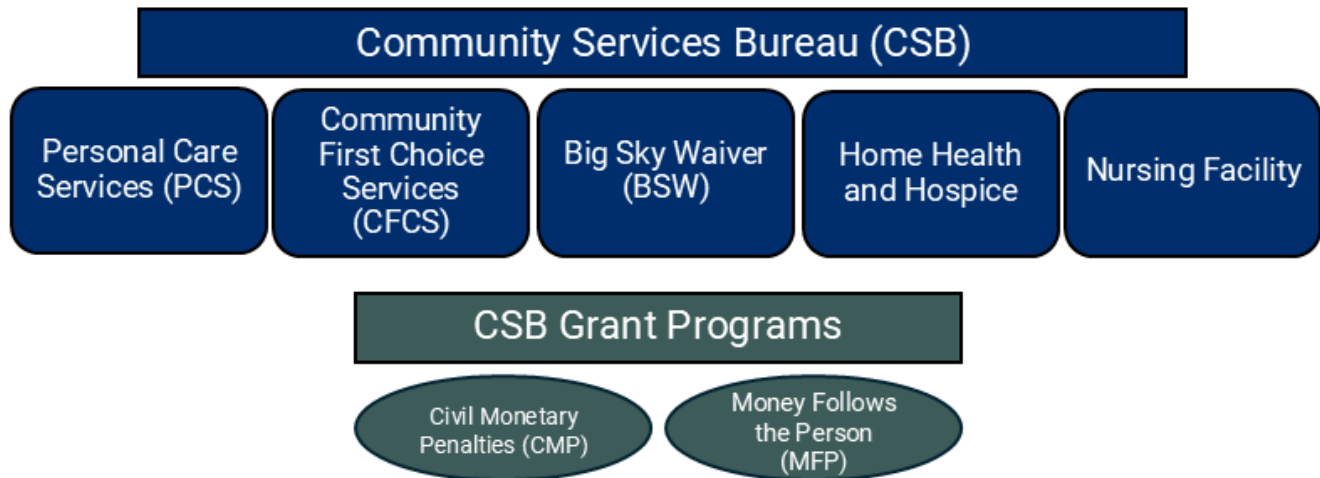
WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT ABUSE OF A VULNERABLE ADULT?

APS specialists help protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They help end abuse by matching the needs of the person with community partners in their area, such as mental health professionals, public health officials, law enforcement, the courts, the aging network, and other community groups.

- If you suspect harm is occurring right now, call 911
- If the concern is not life-threatening, you can call (844) 277-9300 or contact APS online: dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/aps
- If you would like more info about APS, contact Senior and Long Term Care to get a brochure: (406) 444-4077

Montana's Continuum of Care Part Three

Expanding Access to Long-Term Care Services



You may recall from part two of this series, found in the Spring issue, we provided an overview of Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) — essential programs that help Montanans stay in their homes and communities instead of having to move into facilities. Part Three delves into the composition of the Community Services Bureau (CSB) and CSB grant programs.

Services

CSB is made up of several distinct programs that offer services to individuals of all ages in need of regular personal assistance. Several provide home and community-based care for those who wish to remain in their community. Personal care services (PCS) provide support with daily activities at home, such as bathing, dressing, and meal preparation. Additional services like yard hazard

removal, personal emergency response systems, and community integration are available through community first-choice services (CFCS), which, like PCS, serve individuals who would otherwise need to live institutionally.

The Big Sky Waiver (BSW) targets the needs of those with physical disabilities and/or the elderly. BSW members can access many services, including residential habilitation, case management, and home and vehicle modifications. Home health services offer skilled medical care within the home, while hospice care is for those facing a terminal illness in need of end-of-life palliative care.

CSB's nursing facility program does not qualify as HCBS. Nursing facilities are scattered across the state to meet the

needs of individuals requiring skilled nursing care or rehabilitation services due to injury or disability. Some residents may require consistent care because of their mental or physical condition.

Grant Programs

Through its grant programs, CSB enhances care quality and access for individuals who require long-term services, helping build stronger pathways to independence and choice.

Civil Monetary Penalties: When a Medicare-certified nursing facility does not meet the requirements set by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), they may be charged with federal monetary penalties. When this happens, part of the Civil Money Penalties (CMP) funds is reinvested through a grant process to improve the quality of life of nursing facility residents.

These funds can be used to improve performance, for quality assurance programs, and for direct enhancements to the quality of life and care of residents. CMP reinvestment funds cannot be used for employee salaries, research, or capital improvements.

In addition to nursing facility providers, several organizations could be eligible for CMP funds, including family or resident councils, consumer advocacy organizations, and state agencies. SLTCD reviews applications then passes them on to CMS for final approval. Find out more about CMP on the [Civil Monetary](#)

[Penalties Grant Opportunities webpage \(dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/cmp\)](https://dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/cmp).

Money Follows the Person: MFP is a federally funded grant program, or demonstration project, that helps individuals transition from institutional care back into the community. It connects them with the HCBS they need to live successfully at home.

To qualify, a senior must have lived in an institutional setting, like a nursing facility, for at least 60 days with Medicaid coverage for at least one of those days. If eligible, a recipient must also become a member of a DPHHS waiver program, including the BSW, Developmental Disabilities waiver, or Severe Disabling Mental Illness waiver.

The waiver program will guide the member in creating a person-centered plan of care, to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition back into the community. An apartment with an individual lease, group home, or owned or leased home are all qualified residential settings for transition. MFP participants receive continued support for a full year following their initial move.

Find out more about MFP on the [MFP webpage \(dphhs.mt.gov/SLTC/mfp\)](https://dphhs.mt.gov/SLTC/mfp).

In the next “Aging in the 406” newsletter, we’ll explore the Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (BHDD) and BHDD grant programs in part four of our series on the SLTCD Continuum of Care. Stay tuned!



Elaine Wilson (left) and Lois Curtis (right)
Public Domain, US Dept. of Labor

for a brand new Curtis/Wilson Plan to be disseminated in late 2025.

We are proud that this plan has been informed heavily by people with disabilities and are hopeful it brings greater access to community-integrated services to people with disabilities across the lifespan and across Montana. Let us honor Lois and Elaine by continuing to build a world where everyone has the freedom to live, work, play, age, and thrive in the communities they choose.

Administrator's Corner continued from page 5

Kerrie has shared she will deeply miss working with all the people she has met throughout her career and has truly loved being able to serve Montanans. In her well-deserved retirement, she looks forward to spending more time with her family, including her new granddaughter. She also has a lot of home and landscaping projects planned to keep her busy.

Please join me in congratulating Kerrie on her retirement and thanking her for her exceptional contributions to the ASB!

Welcoming Interim Bureau Chief Tessa Bailey

As the recruiting and hiring process for a permanent replacement begins, I am also pleased to announce Tessa Bailey has stepped into the role of interim bureau chief.

Many are already familiar with Tessa. She grew up in Wibaux, Mont., and earned her

Bachelor of Science degree in food and nutrition from Montana State University-Bozeman in 2006. Tessa began her career at Northern Montana Hospital in Havre, where she also served as director of the WIC program for Hill, Blaine, and Liberty counties. After moving to Helena in 2011, she gained valuable experience working with the state WIC program and the school nutrition program at the Office of Public Instruction. Since 2023, she has been a vital part of the ASB, serving as the Nutrition and Evidenced-Based Program manager.

I am confident Tessa's extensive experience and dedication will ensure a smooth transition and continued success for the ASB. Please join me in congratulating Tessa on her new interim role.

Leadership matters deeply in the services we offer — and Kerrie has set a remarkable standard. With Tessa stepping in, we all look forward to what's ahead.