



**Proponent Testimony  
Joe Gage, Housing Coordinator  
Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District**

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**House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development & Natural Resources  
March 15, 2017**

Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Kelly, my name is Joe Gage and I am the Housing Coordinator for the Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District. Buckeye Hills is a regional council serving members in eight Appalachian counties in southeastern Ohio including Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, and Perry & Washington.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 49 and the importance of funding for Ohio's Housing Trust Fund to rural Appalachian areas.

Buckeye Hills is designated by the Ohio Department of Aging as an Area Agency on Aging for Region 8 (AAA8) and the Southeast Ohio Aging & Disability Resource Network. One of Buckeye Hills' roles is to coordinate the region's home modification and minor home repair program.

In 2016 the Buckeye Hills Home Accessibility Modification and Minor Home Repair Program utilized \$934,033 in funding from multiple sources to complete 139 projects across the region in 2016. Fifty (50) projects totaling \$250,237 were completed under the Housing Assistance Grant Program. These projects included minor repairs to the home and making the residence handicapped accessible. Matching funds of \$101,818 from the USDA, combined with \$9,150 from the Senior Community Block Grant, were also secured for these projects. Sixty-four (64) projects for a total cost of \$440,673 were completed in the under age 60 Ohio Home Care Waiver program which also provided handicapped persons accessibility in their homes. And another twenty-five (25) projects were completed for a total cost of \$132,155 under the PASSPORT Medicaid waiver program.

The Housing Trust Fund program enables us to direct more Ohio Medicaid dollars toward medically necessary services. With services available through the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and through programs like the Ohio PASSPORT waiver program, which is administered locally by the network of Ohio Area Agencies on Aging, there has been a fundamental shift in the balance of Medicaid funding toward home and community-based services and away from more expensive nursing facilities.

In the Buckeye Hills' region last year, the average yearly PASSPORT plan cost was \$13,794 (an average monthly plan cost of \$1,262). According to the Administration on Aging, average nursing home costs in our region are \$40,841-\$43,472 annually.

Whether we remodel a bathroom or install a ramp for better accessibility, these projects empower people to age with dignity in their homes. One such example is Jake Vandall of Marietta. Jake has benefitted from a variety of aging-in-place projects and services helping her remain in her Marietta home, where she prefers to be.



After her leg was amputated, Jake initially spent some time in a nursing home; but high-quality, innovative and person-centered care have since helped keep her in the setting she prefers – home! PASSPORT and the Housing Program at the Buckeye Hills' Area Agency on Aging helped coordinate the remodeling of Jake's bathroom and the installation of a new handicap ramp, making it easier for her to do day-to-day activities from a wheelchair. You may read more about Jake in the story attached to my written testimony.

I am living the dream working in a field that gives me the kind of satisfaction that comes from helping someone acquire the environment they need to be as independent and productive as they wish. As a certified Aging-in-Place specialist, I work with program contractors, small businesses across the region, who perform these necessary services.

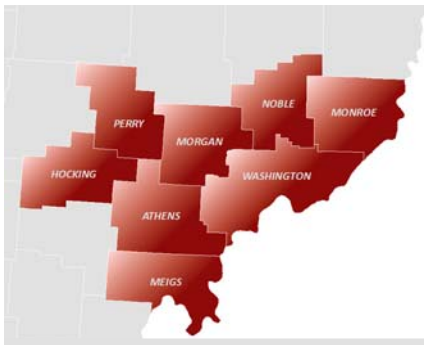
With a current waiting list of more than 30 projects throughout its region, Buckeye Hills received notice from the Development Services Agency that its 2017 Housing grant would be \$50,000 less than the previous year. This shortfall means fewer persons in need will be served across a region with a poverty rate of 21.1%, an unemployment rate of 8.73% (well above both the national and state averages) and a median household income of only \$34,000.

By 2030, adults 65 years of age and older will make up nearly 25 percent of Ohio's population, up from 14 percent today. This dramatic change will generate a substantial and unsustainable demand upon Medicaid funds. Too often, people are compelled to unnecessarily enter costly nursing homes because of basic home modification or minor repair needs.

For the past 13 years, Ohio's Housing Trust Fund has continually fallen short of the original \$50 million/year goal. As revenue to the fund decreased due to the decline of the housing market, the need for assistance has increased. The economic recession took a toll on the Fund, and it has not recovered. Fee revenues decreased from a high of \$73 million in fiscal year 2005 to \$43.7 million in FY 2016. As the fee revenue declines, so does the Fund's ability to support various aging and disability-related home modification initiatives that could assist the state in reigning in Medicaid costs.

With the dire implications of the age wave upon us in this country, we ask that this subcommittee consider making a greater investment in these cost-saving services by increasing funding for Ohio's Housing Trust Fund from the General Revenue Fund of \$15 million in the next biennium budget. The incremental increases in the Trust Fund will help save taxpayer dollars and begin to reign in Medicaid spending by providing services to aging and vulnerable persons who prefer to age in place at home in the community, rather than in more costly nursing homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I will attempt to answer any questions that you may have. If you have questions at a later date, or need additional information, please contact me at 1-800-331-2644.



# Buckeye Hills - Hocking Valley Regional Development District

Area Agency on Aging 8 • Community Development • Economic Development • Regional Transportation



## Meet Jake:

**Ohio Housing Trust Fund & PASSPORT consumer, Jake Vandall (shown seated) credits her Quality of Life aide Yvonne Kaiden (standing, center) and her Area Agency on Aging 8 PASSPORT care manager Lynn Linscott, RN, and the Buckeye Hills Housing Coordinator & certified Aging-in-Place specialist, Joe Gage, for helping her age in place at home, where she prefers to be.**

Jake Vandall has benefitted from a variety of aging-in-place projects and services helping her remain in her Marietta home, where she prefers to be. After an amputation of her leg, Jake spent some time in a nursing home but high-quality, innovative and person-centered care are helping keep her in the setting she prefers – home!

“They were good to me there, but I’d rather be at home,” she said. Referencing her amputation, she shared “You just have to go on living and here, I have my dog, Benny (who’s been here companion for 15 years).”

Jake is a consumer on Ohio’s PASSPORT program, administered locally by the Buckeye Hills Area Agency on Aging 8. This is one supportive resource that helps her age-in-place at home. Vandall’s care plan team has a combined total of 67 years of experience in helping people age-in-place at home.



“Her care plan includes in-home services, delivered through Quality of Life home care, that include nursing support, personal care, homemaker services, home-delivered meals and an emergency alert system,” shared Lynn Linscott, AAA8 PASSPORT Care Manager. “She also receives support through a program at Washington-Morgan Community Action that assists with paying her bills.”

PASSPORT and the Home Modification & Minor Repair Program (funded through the Ohio Housing Trust Fund) at Buckeye Hills helped coordinate a bathroom remodel for better accessibility and a new handicap ramp easing her ability to do day-to-day activities from a wheelchair. The Area Agency on Aging 8 is helping families in the region providing care coordination for eligible seniors 60 years of age and older. Funded through Medicaid, last year PASSPORT allowed about 1,280 seniors in the AAA8 eight-county region remain at home for a fraction of the cost of nursing home placement. PASSPORT is designed to promote independence for individuals at home with long-term care needs. For individuals not eligible for PASSPORT, the AAA8 also helps with referrals to other home-and-community-based supports and services.



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