

TESTIMONY BEFORE

THE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINANCE & APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

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OHIO COALITION OF ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Presented by

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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Larry Vavro and I am a member of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services and am the Adult Protective Services (APS) Chief for the Cuyahoga County Division of Senior and Adult Services. I've been involved with Adult Protective Services since 1996 serving as an APS worker, supervisor and currently as APS Chief overseeing the work of 4 supervisors and 26 social services workers as the mandated APS provider for our county.

I am here today to testify on behalf of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services. OCAPS is a statewide coalition comprised of county APS providers and others whose mission is to enhance services in Ohio to adults at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation through education and advocacy. OCAPS was established in 1985 soon after the passage of Adult Protective Services law in Ohio.

In 2016, Cuyahoga County APS investigated and substantiated nearly 2,400 unduplicated cases of adult neglect, abuse and exploitation. This reflects an increase of almost 18% from the previous year with an additional 362 cases. We anticipate seeing even more increases as Ohio anticipates its senior population to grow.

Elder abuse experts believe that adult abuse is vastly underreported. A study funded by the Health Path Foundation of Ohio estimated that at least 105,000 seniors, age 60 and older are abused or neglected each year by people they trust.

Changes to the APS law in the last budget allowed for building infrastructure at the state and county level to ensure consistency and responsiveness to the needs of Ohio's seniors. The subsequent changes to the APS law put greater demand on already strained-to-the limit services that continue to rely on local funding when it's available. The current funding allocation of \$30,000 per year per county is not enough to ensure a full-time APS staff is available to seniors in every county. We are fortunate in Cuyahoga County to have local health and human services levy funding enabling us to have resources for completing investigations, but with additional state funding, we would be able to complete even more needed investigations.

I'd like to give you two examples of the impact of Adult Protective Services and how it saves lives. To maintain confidentiality, I'll call them Beth and Charlie.

After multiple inspections, Beth, a 66 year old woman, had her home deemed uninhabitable due to filth and structural damage. The home had no working plumbing, and she had been defecating and urinating on the floor causing the floors to become rotten and unstable. The house was in total disrepair and the home's odor salient from the outside. Beth wasn't able to comprehend the significance of the situation, nor make appropriate decisions to act to correct the dangerous living conditions. She had multiple inspections with correction plans which she never worked through and the city issued a vacate order. Beth had also been hospitalized multiple times at local hospitals due to psychiatric issues. The APS worker got her to agree to get an assessment by an in-home geriatrician. He was able to get her to agree to get injectable psychotropic meds from her psychiatrist because of her difficulty remaining medication compliant. Beth trusted the worker and wanted him present while addressing not only her mental health and cognitive concerns, but her struggles with her city's building department. APS guided her to address what could happen if forced to leave her home. For the first time, she faced the reality that she may need to move into an apartment and requested housing resources previously offered and assistance in making a choice. Presently, she is cleaning her home and making needed repairs. She has remained in her home, remains medication compliant and is planning more realistically her future life options.

APS investigated the case of Charlie, a 90 year old male allegedly being exploited by his son and daughter-in-law. The son had power of attorney over his father and both he and his wife had been isolating him, controlling who could visit or call. They placed extra locks on the door of his home without giving him the keys, creating a concern that he wouldn't be able to get out if there was a fire. Unable to visit family and friends the son further isolated his father by taking away his car keys. The son had his father sign a quit claim deed to the house, but when others found out about it, the home was returned to his father. Charlie was a retired professional golfer with an estate worth over \$2 million dollars.

After interviewing the man and his family, APS learned the son was insisting his father's dialysis be discontinued, but Charlie wanted to continue the care as he understood he would die without it. The son insisted that his father didn't have the capacity to make such decisions, however APS followed up with Charlie's physician who stated he still had capacity. As the investigation continued, his capacity began to deteriorate and the son began to take advantage of his father's memory lapses, first by following through on the quit claim deed and accessing his father's funds to put a deposit down on a \$140,000 home. An attorney who was supposed to be representing Charlie seemed to instead favor the

son which delayed any type of APS intervention to protect him. It took almost a year of legal intervention, due to family resistance, before Charlie was granted a guardian based on his lack of capacity. The county prosecutor's office also pursued criminal charges of exploitation by the son and daughter-in-law based on the evidence discovered during the APS investigation. Charlie ended up remaining in the home with supportive services and an appointed guardian who managed the rest of his assets. His son and daughter-in-law were charged with theft and money laundering of their father's assets in an amount totaling more than \$1 million dollars. These are just two examples of why Ohio should invest at least a base amount of \$65,000 per year to each county to ensure Ohio's seniors are kept safe.

OCAPS supports an increase of at least \$10 million per year to include the \$65,000 base per county and to fully fund a dedicated full-time worker to ensure quality core services are available in each county, regardless of the availability of local funds. Additional dollars can be distributed by formula to provide for emergency services, coordination of interdisciplinary teams, support for outreach and education, and other important activities and services to stabilize victims of abuse and neglect.

In conclusion, OCAPS is grateful to the Ohio General Assembly for putting protection of Ohio's frail and vulnerable adults in the forefront and its commitment to strengthen the adult protective services system. However, without sufficient resources to get the job done, more seniors will not receive the support needed to keep them healthy and safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.