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Testimony before the Ohio House Finance Health & Human Services Subcommittee

Presented by:

Shon E. Gress

Ohio Association of Senior Centers, Board President

Ohio Aging Advocacy Coalition, Board Member

Center for Community Based Care, Board Member

Southeastern Med Hospital, Board of Directors, Past-President

Meals on Wheels Ohio Chapter, Board Vice-President

Guernsey County Senior Citizens Center, Inc. & Meals on Wheels-Guernsey County, Executive Director

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Health & Human Services Subcommittee thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Shon Gress. I am the President of the Ohio Association of Senior Centers. I have proudly served as the Executive Director of Guernsey County Senior Citizens Center, Inc. & Meals on Wheels Guernsey County, located in Cambridge, Ohio for over 16 years. I also currently serve on the board of directors of the Ohio Aging Advocacy Coalition, Center for Community Based Care, Southeastern Med Hospital, and the Ohio Chapter of Meals on Wheels.

The Ohio Association of Senior Centers, Inc., (OASC) was formed as a non-profit organization in 1959 and has become a forerunner in promoting senior centers through advocacy, professional development, communication and networking. OASC

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recognizes differences in purpose and scope, but celebrates our common factor: the older adults that we serve. OASC supports and enhances the ability of Ohio's senior center network to effectively serve older adults in our communities through: education, mentoring and training, professional senior center staff certification, identification and development of new funding resources, and information on legislative issues and organized advocacy efforts on behalf of older Ohioans.

As the 2017/2018 budget for the State of Ohio is formulated, OASC and our constituents strongly support:

- **Increasing PASSPORT/Medicaid Waiver unit reimbursement rates by 5%** - this will ensure the continued delivery of high quality programs and services for Ohio's most vulnerable community based population. In the 2015/16 biennium budget, PASSPORT service providers received a 3% across the board reduction in rates, while the administrative area received a 5% increase in funding. Providers were forced to maintain services and meet increased need by not completing repairs and purchase of new equipment, but redirecting funds for those purposes. This is a temporary fix as the needed repairs and inadequate equipment cannot be "band-aided" into perpetuity. It should be noted that many of the staff of these service providers are older adults needing paid jobs to supplement their retirement incomes. With these part-time positions, these retirees also continue to contribute to the State's income tax coffers.

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- **Restoration of Senior Community Services Block Grant levels to \$15 million.** SCSBG funds services that enable older adults to remain living in their homes for as long as possible, rather than a more expensive alternative such as a nursing home facility. This line item funds a diverse array of services for adults 60 and older including home delivered and congregate meals, transportation, personal care, respite, and caregiver supports. Since 2001, the SCSBG line item has been cut by 54%—from over \$15 million to \$7 million per state fiscal year. While demands for programs and services for Ohio's older adults continue to grow, funding has been reduced to \$7 million annually. Ohio has a vibrant and rich network of more than 450 full- and part-time senior centers, which offer Ohioans age 60 and older a place to go for nutritious meals, social activities, volunteer opportunities, health screenings, health and consumer education, creative arts, exercise and more. Many multipurpose senior centers work with local partners to deliver home and community-based services that allow older adults to live independently in their own homes (i.e., transportation services, meals-on-wheels, adult day care, telephone reassurance, senior companions, personal care, homemaker services and more). Cutting programs like these does not make economic sense. SCSBG services such as transportation, home delivered meals and personal care not only provide a much needed service to some of Ohio's most vulnerable older adults, it combats the deadly effects of social isolation. Ohio ranks 10th in the nation and first in the Midwest for seniors

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suffering from hunger. For many seniors Meals on Wheels is the ONLY MEAL they eat. We know that that Meals on Wheels helps seniors to stay out of much more expensive healthcare settings like unnecessary visits to emergency rooms, admissions & readmissions to hospitals, and premature placement in long-term care facilities, which saves tax-payers millions of dollars annually. Meals on Wheels helps reduce falls among the elderly. Nationally we spend \$31 billion in falls alone and we know that Meals on Wheels recipients say that just by having that nutritious meal, being nourished, knowing that someone is coming to check on them, they fall less and have less fear of falling. So, we know the economic outcomes, value and return on investment are well served within Meals on Wheels programs. Brown University did a research study in 2012 and determined that for every state that spends \$25.00 more per senior on Meals on Wheels would realize a reduction in the low-care nursing home population of up to 1%. That translates to millions of dollars in Medicaid savings alone. In Guernsey County, Ohio Meals on Wheels Guernsey County has partnered with Area Agency on Aging-Region 9 and Southeastern Med Hospital to re-launch their "Meals As You Mend" program, which provides 30 meals to hospital patients, age 60 and older, upon discharge. This program has helped reduce hospital readmissions among the most chronically ill (pneumonia, COPD, heart disease) by 15%.

- **Maintain the integrity of MLTCS with involvement of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's).** It's too soon to move PASSPORT recipients to Managed Care

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in all of Ohio's 88 counties. Ohio's federally defined demonstration program (MyCare Ohio), which integrates Medicare & Medicaid in 29 mostly urban counties did not even include southeastern, rural, and Appalachian counties in Ohio, where senior citizens have long been provided with care from local community based and community driven senior centers and providers. PASSPORT is already well-coordinated care, especially in small rural economically deprived communities. The Area Agencies on Aging have a 30 year history of screening, assessment, care management and a well-established and well monitored provider network and provider management model, which includes senior center partners and OASC members across the State. Elimination of the AAA's role serving as a clearinghouse between the Managed Care Organizations and those providers not involved in the pilot / demonstration project of MyCareOhio (MCO) has many senior center providers and administrators across the state very concerned. The impact of expanding the MCO model without ensuring that locally established and trusted multi-senior service providers (who have been kept outside of the demonstration project and do not currently participate in MyCare Ohio) have already been placed in an economic and programmatic disadvantage. The non-demonstration and omitted providers have not seen the same economic gains (or losses) as current MyCare Ohio providers. Should AAA's roles as a for-profit clearing house and contract administrator be omitted or curtailed in the transition to MCO, many providers, specifically in the areas of the state already omitted from MyCare Ohio, would not

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even know where to begin to begin the arduous task of working and negotiating with MCO's to establish "fair & equitable" program reimbursement rates and service plans. By-passing or underscoring certain "transition safeguards and preventative measures" will have a direct negative impact on the older adult consumers, especially in the rural areas due to the third party providers which have been proposed. PASSPORT service program funding accounts for approximately \$500,000 of Guernsey County Senior Citizens Center's \$2.3 million annual overall operating budget. The loss of Medicaid Waiver/PASSPORT funding accounts for 46% of their overall operating budget. Transitioning these dollars from a local rural provider to a corporate-rich Managed Care Organization equates to hundreds and hundreds of seniors losing the services they already rely upon and trust, the loss of 25-30 jobs at the senior center, and the vast economic losses to almost 20 small Ohio rural based businesses, which are vendors the senior center works with to provide care and services to low-income older adults. As the State expands the MCO, please be reminded that Senior Centers throughout Ohio already know the client base and can ease the transition. Senior Centers have spent decades developing trust, camaraderie, loyalty, understanding, and a caring local rapport and relationship with older Ohioans.

A major concern of the OASC membership is that should MCO's opt to contract with national food service providers (ie. Mom's Meals, EZ Meals, etc), which provide a drop

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of bulk meals weekly, biweekly, or monthly either with their own drivers or the United States Postal Service, UPS, or FedEx, the homebound older adults will be negatively impacted. The significant loss is the daily delivery which provides a mid-day wellness check. Daily contact is critical to many older adults who live in rurally isolated communities. It should be noted that in many instances, the daily delivery person many Senior Center's either employ as paid staff or host as volunteers are often the only person that the homebound elder has contact. These daily programs and deliveries have saved many seniors from multiple situations and life threatening circumstances. It should also be noted that mail order meals often do not cut it, and the majority of elders who've tried these vendor's products more often than not return to their local Meals on Wheels provider.

Our services are "much more than just a meal" or a place to have parties and make people feel good. We prevent social isolation. We engage seniors in all aspects of community life. We report cases of elder abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation and take a vested interest at the table of many Intensive APS Intervention Team meetings and counseling sessions. We report to local authorities the increasing heroine and drug addictive homes that our employees enter into each day and we have seen how addiction has traumatized and destroyed families, which are a foundation for many Ohio neighborhoods and communities. Senior Centers make in-house referrals and connect senior citizens to beneficial services and programs that improve and enhance their overall wellness and quality of life. We're counting on you to please help

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senior citizens thrive and to aide us in meeting the needs & caring for Ohio's growing older adult population.

Chairman Romanchuk and subcommittee members thank you again for providing me the opportunity to testify. I will be happy to answer or address any questions that you or any of the committee members may have.

TOGETHER, WE CAN DELIVER.

The number of seniors in our country will grow exponentially over the coming years. Meals on Wheels is a proven public-private partnership that effectively addresses the challenges of aging by promoting health and improving quality of life for our nation's most vulnerable seniors. By leveraging the existing Meals on Wheels network, we have the opportunity to not only keep seniors at home, but also save billions in tax dollars by keeping them out of more costly healthcare settings.

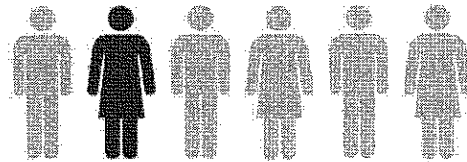


TOO MANY SENIORS IN OHIO ARE LEFT BEHIND, ALONE AND HUNGRY, STRUGGLING TO STAY INDEPENDENT AND HEALTHY.

671,333 are isolated, living alone

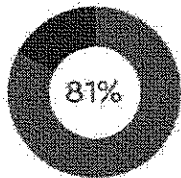
443,770 are threatened by hunger

694,565 are living in or near poverty

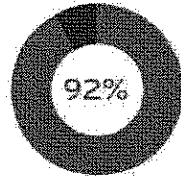


Nationally, 1 IN 6 seniors struggles with hunger

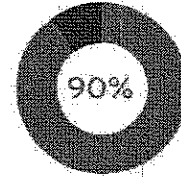
MEALS ON WHEELS DELIVERS THE SUPPORT THAT KEEPS SENIORS IN THEIR OWN HOMES, WHERE THEY WANT TO BE.



say it improves their health

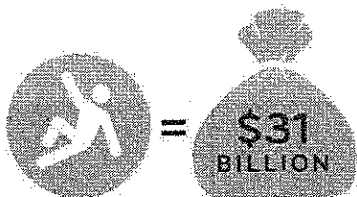


say it enables them to remain living at home

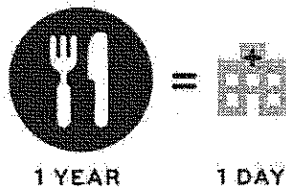


say it makes them feel more safe and secure

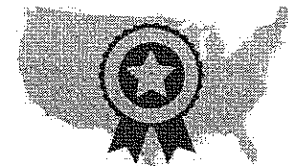
SENIORS REMAINING AT HOME, OUT OF HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES, SAVES BILLIONS IN MEDICARE AND MEDICAID COSTS.



Meals on Wheels' clients report fewer falls, which cost our nation \$31 BILLION each year.



We can provide a senior Meals on Wheels for 1 YEAR for roughly the same cost as 1 DAY in a hospital.



Investing in Meals on Wheels is a WIN-WIN for our seniors, our communities and our nation.



THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT

For more than 50 years, THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) has been the primary piece of federal legislation supporting social and nutrition services to Americans age 60 and older. OAA programs are vital for seniors who are at significant risk of hunger, isolation and losing their ability to live independently. Title III of the OAA establishes a grant system to fund programs that address the unique needs of vulnerable seniors.

These include services such as:

- Home-delivered meals and meals served in group settings such as senior centers
- Transportation
- In-home personal care and community supports
- Caregiver assistance
- Preventative health and wellness programs
- Employment services and training

OHIO OAA NUTRITION PROGRAMS

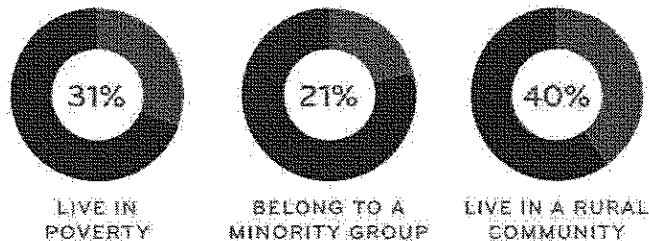
PROGRAM PROFILE

TOTAL SENIORS SERVED BY MEALS ON WHEELS PROGRAMS	83,737
Home-Delivered	35,953
Congregate	47,784
TOTAL MEALS SERVED BY MEALS ON WHEELS PROGRAMS	7,696,772
Home-Delivered	5,760,330
Congregate	1,936,442
TOTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM EXPENDITURES	\$57,265,616
EXPENDITURES COVERED BY FEDERAL OAA FUNDING	\$18,806,085



Nationally, Meals on Wheels serves **500,000 VETERANS** each year

CLIENT PROFILE (seniors receiving OAA nutrition or other supportive services)

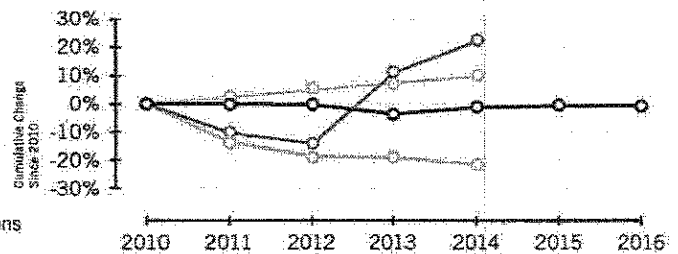


A PROVEN PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

THE OAA covers 33% of the total cost to provide nutritious meals, safety checks and friendly visits to more than **83,500 SENIORS**. Programs rely on contributions from state, local, private donations and other resources to cover the rest.

GROWING GAP BETWEEN SENIORS IN NEED AND SENIORS SERVED

With 12,000 individuals turning 60 every day nationwide, a senior population increasingly threatened by hunger and federal funding failing to keep pace, the gap between those in need and those being served continues to widen. Funding for OAA programs is provided through the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS-Education) annual appropriations bill, and dollars are allocated to states based on a formula.



- Total Seniors Threatened By Hunger
- Total OAA Nutrition Appropriations
- Total Population 60+
- Total Seniors Served

Meals on Wheels America is the oldest and largest national organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based senior nutrition programs across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior isolation and hunger. This network exists in virtually every community in America and, along with more than two million volunteers, delivers the nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks that enable America's seniors to live nourished lives with independence and dignity. By providing funding, leadership, research, education and advocacy support, Meals on Wheels America empowers its local member programs to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time.