

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chairman Oelslager & Ranking Member Cera

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Testimony submitted by the Council On Older Persons (COOP)

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Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Cera, members of the committee. My name is Catherine Ciha. I serve as the Chairwoman of the Council On Older Persons (COOP), a 70-year-old standing committee of The Center for Community Solutions, a non-partisan, nonprofit public policy think tank that aims to improve health, social and economic conditions through research, policy analysis and communication. COOP's members are 50 representatives from public, non-profit and private sectors who advocate on behalf of issues that affect seniors in Greater Cleveland. Professionally, I work as the Director of Development at Senior Transportation Connection, though I am not presenting on behalf of STC, nor on behalf of CCS.

I represent COOP as a member of the coalition MOVE Ohio, representing the interests of transit riders across the state. I respectfully provide testimony to address how Ohio's public transit systems and accessible transportation providers are a vital lifeline for older Ohioans. House Bill 62 is an opportunity to increase investments in public transportation options that benefit the 22.4 percent of Ohio's citizens who are aged 60 or older.

The 2015 ODOT Statewide Transit Needs Study prioritized "Creating more ways for older adults and persons with disabilities to get around" as a most important consideration for transit decision-making and financial investments.

The ability to drive declines with age, with measurable impact on independence and health. More than 50 percent of older non-drivers stay home. They make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer shopping trips and 65 percent fewer trips for social, family and religious purposes. When older Ohioans depend on others for transportation, access to healthcare suffers, increasing the likelihood of poor health outcomes. Their mental health suffers as well, with a loss of personal identity, decreased independence, life satisfaction and lower productivity (Vivoda, Heeringa, et al.).

Poorer health outcomes among low-income seniors burdens Ohio's Medicaid program in its efforts to control costs. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the average cost of a semiprivate room in a nursing home is \$6,844 per month, or \$82,128 per year, for room, board and some healthcare services. Community based services and supports – including transportation – can keep older adults safely independent in their own homes longer, delaying the move to a nursing home and the associated costs incurred by Medicaid.

Family caregivers cannot provide the solution for non-driving seniors. AARP estimates that 22 percent of adults aged 45 to 64 care for a parent. Among those caregivers, 68 percent report making work accommodations to meet caregiving responsibilities: arriving late or leaving early, taking time off, reducing hours or leaving the labor force.

The 2018 National Aging & Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) poll of older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers further inform local findings and research:

- 74 percent of older adults who drive have already cut back on driving.

- 68 percent of older adults say finding alternatives to driving is very or somewhat difficult.
- 40 percent of older adults cannot do their activities or chores because they do not drive.
- 39 percent of caregivers spend five or more hours providing transportation for friends or relatives each week.
- Access and availability (40 percent) and affordability (12 percent) are barriers to transportation, particularly for those without a caregiver.

H.B. 62 presents an opportunity to respond to a challenge that affects nearly one-quarter of Ohio’s citizens, limiting their independence, interfering with their ability to care for their own health and discouraging full participation in their community.

Adequate funding for public transportation translates into increased mobility options for seniors. If Ohio chooses to increase its gas tax, setting aside 20 percent of these new revenues for the Transportation Choice fund would be a good start toward building our 21st century transportation system-- a system that serves all Ohioans, including seniors and disabled citizens.

COOP joins MOVE Ohio and Policy Matters Ohio in recommending at least \$180 million in dedicated revenues be set aside annually into a Transportation Choice fund to address public transportation recommendations cited in The Ohio Department of Public Transportation 2015 Transit Needs Study. We recommend funding levels at the total amount of \$150 million for public transit. An additional \$30 million in transportation funds recommended for safe pedestrian and bicycling purposes will also contribute to the mobility of older adults.

COOP hopes to be a resource as you consider ways to create the transportation system Ohio needs for all its residents, today and tomorrow. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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