



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

## **Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

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### **Testimony before the Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee**

May 3, 2019

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**CEO, Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about H.B. 166. My name is Larke Recchie, and I am the CEO of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Our members are part of a national network of over 600 on-the-ground organizations in each state, mandated by the Older Americans Act, and charged with helping Americans thrive in our homes and communities as we age.

We are granted by the Older Americans Act with the flexibility to ensure that our communities' local needs and preferences are taken into consideration and that the resulting local delivery system is tailored to our communities.

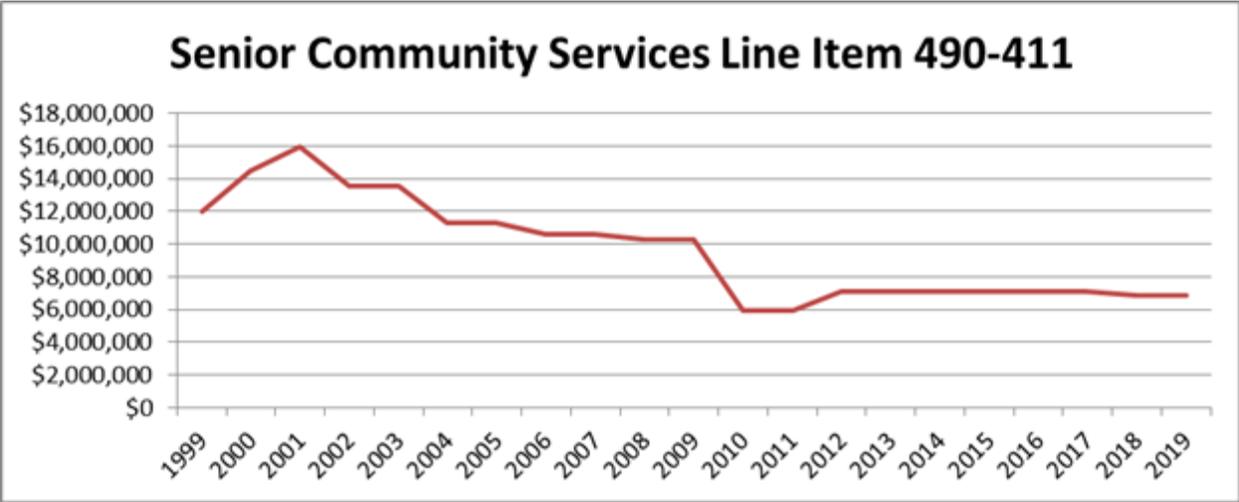
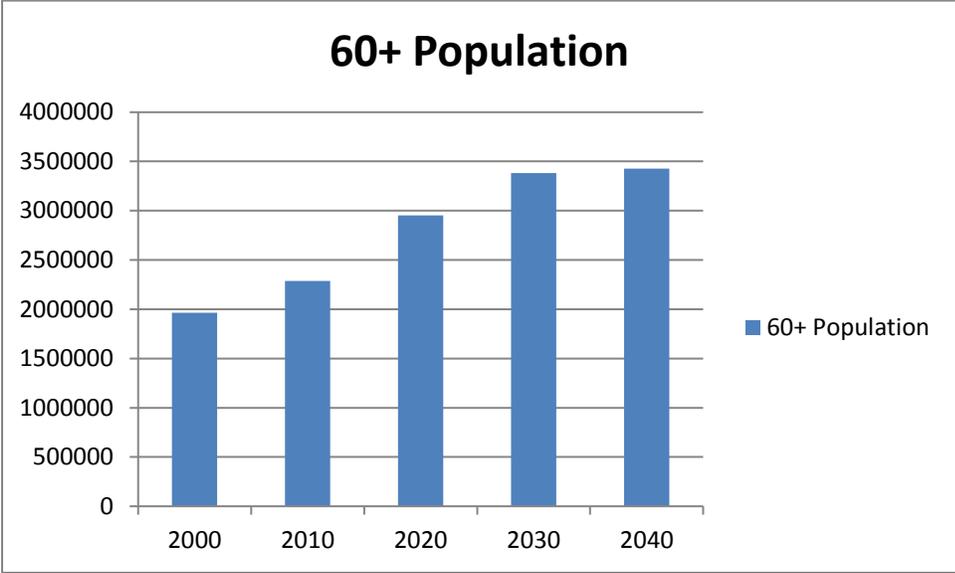
We are all aging, and we are living longer. We are fortunate to be in a period of time where we can say that we are living longer and healthier lives. This is Ohio's Longevity Era. Programs that connect us to our communities at all stages of life are the most effective strategy for addressing social isolation. Without these programs, social isolation greatly increases our risk of neglect and abuse, especially as we age.

## **Senior Community Services**

Among the social structures we rely on to connect us as we age is Ohio's Senior Community Services program (ALI 490-411). **We urge you to consider a modest investment of an additional \$1.9 million to bring the Senior Community Services program to the pre-recession level of \$10 million per year to bolster and reinforce the effectiveness of the program, and we ask that the program retain the flexibility to meet local needs.**

Senior Community Services supports non-Medicaid services that address the social determinants of health for older Ohioans to allow us all to thrive in our communities as we age. Transportation, meals, housing assistance, personal care, and other types of support prevent social isolation and connect us to our communities. Without these connections there is a greater risk of abuse, exploitation and neglect. We leverage resources so that we have the flexibility to ensure our communities' local needs and preferences are taken into consideration and that the resulting local delivery system is tailored to our communities.

We greatly appreciate the Governor's proposal to increase investment in the Senior Community Services program, but it is simply not enough. The program has experienced cuts of over 50% in the last several years.



**Medicaid HCBS Providers:**

Thank you for including a 2.7% rate increase for PASSPORT home care attendant, personal care, and waiver nursing services; increases in PASSPORT home delivered meal rates; and a 2.7% increase in the assisted living waiver rates. Members of the Human Services Subcommittee expressed their support for this requested increase after hearing from many witnesses.

PASSPORT and MyCare programs are experiencing significant challenges in finding personal care aides to provide services. Our Area Agencies on Aging have reported that across the state, in the last year, at least 80 personal care providers have dropped out, and at least another 10 have so far indicated they might do the same. We are not easily able to replace these providers. Providers face low rates, staffing shortages, difficult and conflicting bureaucratic hoops, and economic forces that combine to convince them that our programs are just not worth it to them. Also, the assisted living waiver rate increase is the first since the program started in 2007. Low rates have made it difficult to get assisted living providers to participate in the program.

We must ensure adequate funding and system resources are dedicated to the full spectrum of supports, including the Senior Community Services program, to enable us all to live healthy, engaged and secure lives as we age and access the supports we need in our homes and communities. **We urge you to consider a modest investment of an additional \$1.9 million to the Senior Community Services to ensure that these supports are available to all of us as we age.**