



Western Reserve

Area Agency on Aging

Testimony before the
OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINANCE COMMITTEE
Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Respectively Submitted By:

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On behalf of:

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Advocacy. Assistance. Answers on Aging and Disabilities.

Thank you Chairman Representative Romanchuk, Ranking Member Representative West and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, for the opportunity to testify in support of increasing the Senior Community Services Line Item (ALI 490-411) in the Ohio Department of Aging's budget.

My name is Frank Weglarz. I am a volunteer with the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, Lake County Council on Aging and a Volunteer Adult Guardian with the Lake County Probate Court and Lifeline. I am advocating for an increase in the Senior Community Services program from the proposed \$ 8.1 million to \$10 million for the next two years, restoring funding at the pre-recession funding level. The Senior Community Services funds support older adults in the community for as long as possible, rather than a more expensive alternative such as a nursing home. These non-Medicaid funds support services such as home delivered meals, transportation, personal care services and more.

The aging population has steadily increased year after year. By 2030, adults 65 years and older will make up nearly 25% of Ohio's population. As a volunteer I am concerned with the growing problem of isolation and loneliness among the aging population. Older adults are particularly at risk and disproportionately impacted. Over one-third of older adults report loneliness. Home and community based services, such as home delivered meals, combat this problem. As time goes on and the older population grows, programs that are supported by Senior Community Services need increased funding.

Chronic isolation and loneliness can have harmful health consequences particularly for older adults. It may speed the onset of dementia, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, anxiety and depression. Researchers have found a link between loneliness and fatal heart disease. Isolation leaves people more vulnerable to elder abuse, fraud and scams. In fact, the

health risks of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, according to a Brigham Young University study.

You cannot underestimate the power of being socially connected. I've experienced this power many times in my work with the older adults. For the past four years, I have delivered hot nutritious meals to the frail, homebound elderly. After noticing one of my home delivered meal clients hadn't been eating, I asked if she was okay and she said she was tired of being sick. She seemed sad and lonely. I notified the meal site and they contacted her family and social worker. The Lake County Council on Aging recruited a volunteer to visit and made her family aware of the situation. This increased social interaction has alleviated her loneliness and she is now happier and eating. In my role as an Adult Guardian I've observed my ward, Larry, become noticeably more social and animated as I spend more time with him. He has evolved from giving short one word answers to carrying on conversations.

We need to recognize and acknowledge that isolation and loneliness is a critical health issue that can be addressed by increasing home and community based services provided with Senior Community Services funding. It is not only the services itself that is important, but the human interaction.

Thank you members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of an increase in Senior Community Services on behalf of Ohio's vulnerable seniors.