



**Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**OHIO SENATE**

**Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee**

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**Respectively Submitted By:**

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Thank you Chairman Bob Hackett, Vice Chair Charleta Tavares and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid for the opportunity to testify before you in support of increasing the Senior Community Services Block Grant (ALI 490-411).

My name is Cyndi Rossi, the Legislative Liaison at the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA). WRAAA has been designated by the State of Ohio to serve older adults 60 years and over in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina Counties. It is our mission to provide choices for people to live independently in the place they want to call home. We are one of twelve Ohio Area Agencies on Aging that together serve the entire state.

The Senior Community Services Block Grant funds community-based services to assist older adults to live independently in their own homes and communities. The Ohio Department of Aging uses these funds to draw down federal Older Americans Act dollars. These federal and state dollars fund an array of community based services for individuals age 60 and older through the Area Agencies on Aging such as transportation, personal care, and meals. Based on needs assessments, Area Agencies on Aging have the flexibility to direct these dollars where they are needed most.

The Senior Community Services Block Grant (ALI 490-411) has been reduced from \$15,974,463 in SFY 2001 to \$7,310,844 in SFY 2016, a 54% funding reduction. Substitute HB 49 proposes to reduce the Senior Community Services Block Grant by 1.5% s (reduction of \$106,554 per year) for the next two years, further eroding our ability to serve more seniors. We ask you to restore this flexible funding to \$15 million per state fiscal year, to better position the state and our communities in meeting the growing needs of vulnerable older Ohioans.

I have taken on many roles in my life – a family caregiver, operating a senior center and being an advocate – I know community based services are effective in keeping older adults in their homes and out of hospitals and nursing facilities. In our planning and service area, over 460,000 people are 60 and older, over 131,000 live alone and over 42,000 live in poverty. For many of these older adults, they are alone, struggling to stay independent and healthy.

Home delivered meals is one of the most needed services because many older adults cannot afford, prepare or acquire food. Administered through the Area Agencies on Aging, home delivered meal programs are a low cost solution for a high cost problem. The estimated annual cost of disease-associated malnutrition in older adults in the United States is \$51.3 billion. Fifty percent of all diseases impacting older adults are connected to poor nutrition such as diabetes, congestive heart failure and asthma. The home delivered meal program enables these older adults to eat nutritious meals on a regular basis, and preserving their dignity, health, and quality of life. By giving seniors the nutrition they need on the front end, these programs also save the state dollars on the back end. It reduces burdensome medical costs and eases stress on families trying to care of their aging loved ones. According to the U.S. Administration on Aging, seventy percent of the individuals served by the home delivered meal program in 2012 were more than 75 years old, and more than 60 percent rely on their home delivered meals for more than half of their total daily food intake.

With a growing aging population, meal programs face unprecedented challenges to meet the growing demand and need for meals due to increasing costs and decreased funding. A Brown University study, *More than a Meal*, found states that invest more in delivering meals to seniors' homes have lower rates of "low-care" seniors in nursing homes, saving Medicaid dollars. This national study found those who received daily-delivered meals experienced the greatest improvements in health and quality of life indicators over the study period compared to those who received frozen meals once a week or those who did not receive meals.

Another benefit of the services funded through the Senior Community Services Block Grant is combatting senior isolation. Older adults who describe themselves as lonely have a 59 percent greater risk of functional decline and a 45 percent greater risk of death. The Brown University study confirmed that a regular knock on the door from a driver delivering meals significantly reduces the older adults' feelings of loneliness and provides a safety check. It is an important few minutes of the day, even if the driver's visit is brief. Other community based services such as access to transportation and personal care services are examples of how we can address senior isolation.

Again, we ask you to restore this flexible funding to \$15 million per state fiscal year, to better position the state and our communities in meeting the growing needs of vulnerable older Ohioans.

Thank you members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of increasing the Senior Community Services Block Grant funding.