



**Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging**

## **WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**OHIO SENATE  
Finance Committee  
Health and Medicaid Subcommittee  
May 17, 2017**

**Respectively Submitted By:**

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***On behalf of:***

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

My name is Frank Weglarz. I am a volunteer with the Lake County Council on Aging and, for the past two years, I have delivered meals to the frail, homebound elderly. I am advocating for an increase in the Senior Community Services Block Grant to at least the 2001 level or \$15 million a year. The Senior Community Services Block Grant 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. These funds support services such as home delivered meals, transportation, and personal care services.

In the Ohio Department on Aging's budget, the Senior Community Services Block Grant has been cut by 54% since 2001, yet 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, up from 14% today. In the five county Northeast Ohio region served by Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, over 602,000 fewer meals were served in 2015 than 2002. As a volunteer for the Meals on Wheels program, I am concerned about food insecurity among older adults. According to a study, *The State of Senior Hunger in America 2014*, Ohio ranks 10th in the nation and first in the Midwest for seniors 60 and older who are food insecure. Services such as home delivered meals help address this issue by delivering a hot meal five days a week to the elderly. The cost to feed a senior a meal for 1 year is less than 1 day in the hospital.

In Lake County, nearly 140,000 meals were delivered and 34,000 congregate meals served in 2016 averaging around 700 meals a day, with a waiting list of up to 25 in any given month. We also provide ready-to-eat meals for the weekend and hot holiday meals to those who request them. Additionally, the meal delivery provides a critical safety and wellness check important to those who are

isolated. All drivers are required to 'see and talk' with our clients when meals are delivered. Sometimes we are the only personal contact they receive each day. One of my clients, Elisabeth, who is 82, wasn't feeling well and wasn't eating. When I arrived she asked me to place her food in the refrigerator. I noticed she hadn't eaten meals for the last 2 days. I asked why she hadn't eaten and she said she was tired of being sick. She seemed depressed and lonely. I notified the Lake County Council on Aging who contacted her social worker and family. They also recruited a volunteer (who is an area teacher) to come and visit Elisabeth. Her family is now aware of her situation and she seems happier and is eating. We even joke whenever I bring her meals. I have another client who used to deliver meals and now he and his wife are in need of our service. They both have mobility problems. I bring their meals into their home and set them up on their kitchen counter. I always ask how they are doing. We chat for a minute or two about the weather or his past service to the home delivery meal program. It feels good to help people who volunteered to serve others and now need help themselves. I'm sure that all of our volunteer drivers have similar stories and I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the seniors in my community.

Let me finish with a few of our client testimonials: *"I just want to say how grateful I am to have Meals on Wheels. I don't know what I'd do without it. I'm 98 and live alone."* And finally: *"The gentlemen who delivers to my house are the sunshine of my day. They are kind, considerate, thoughtful and pleasant. They make the lonely days brighter. God bless them for the time that they so graciously give. And to the people who prepare the food. God bless them all."*

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