



Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance: Health and Medicaid Subcommittee
Lawrence Vavro, Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services
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Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony about H.B. 166, and in particular, the Adult Protective Services program that is part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' budget. My name is Lawrence Vavro and I am the Chief of Adult Protective Services in Cuyahoga County and a member of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services (OCAPS).

The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services (OCAPS) is a statewide coalition that strives to enhance the provision of services by collaboration, education, and advocacy on behalf of older people who may be at risk or are survivors of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The House included an additional \$1.49 million per state fiscal year in its version of the budget bill. We greatly appreciate the General Assembly's continued support for adult protective services and acknowledgment that more needs to be done. With this increase, each county will receive a little over \$48,000 per year to support their programs, which is more than the \$31,000 per year that is currently made available to them.

As it stands currently, there is no other dedicated source of funding for Adult Protective Services in Ohio other than this state line item in the JFS budget. While some communities are able to leverage local dollars to further support the system, it puts undue pressure on the community to deal with competing important priorities, and results in a distinct disparity in capacity between those counties with the means to further subsidize the system compared to those who cannot.

We believe in a just society that recognizes that all people are equal. No matter how old we are, we are entitled to be treated as full members of our communities. Adult Protective Services is among the supports we rely on to be there for us as we age. This support has been bolstered with recent changes to the law that have improved understanding of elder abuse, included more mandatory reporters, fortified the state and local systems, connected interrelated supports, and increased resources to enable local systems to do more.

The transformation of APS has resulted in a system that is intended to be more responsive to our communities and to be better able to respond quickly to elder abuse and neglect. One example is that each county must establish its own interdisciplinary team (I-Team) to bring together APS, law enforcement, the courts, and social services, at a minimum, to engage in case reviews and identify gaps and resources. I-Teams are an incredibly useful tool to help counties with educating all agencies that are dealing with elder abuse or its effects and to leverage resources and expertise, but it takes time to develop relationships and establish the commitment among agencies to attend meetings and share resources.

That is why we ask for an increased investment for adult protective services: to enable local communities to make more connections, strengthen existing connections and to find better ways to respond quickly to elder abuse and neglect.

Each county should be provided with at least **\$65,000 per year** and additional resources so that every county can employ at least one full-time staff person and enable the dedicated APS staff/worker to create a feasible safety case plan for the abused older adult to alleviate the risk.

We believe that an additional investment of \$5.77 million per year above the proposed funding levels in the House bill is necessary to accomplish these goals.

Just in SFY 2018 we have seen an increase of 3,000 reports of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation statewide, to almost 20,000 reports in one year. Anecdotally we believe that these numbers are only increasing, which aligns with recent research that says that an estimated 100,000 or more cases of elder abuse and neglect occur in Ohio each year, with only a fraction reported to adult protective services.

The consequences of not having a robust adult protective services system in place to ensure access to justice for us all as we age is significant. Financial losses (annually estimated as \$36.5 billion per year nationally) can bankrupt individuals and even other family members, causing them to turn to publicly funded programs to provide for their basic needs. In fact, one in ten financial abuse victims will turn to Medicaid as a direct result of their own monies being stolen from them. Victims of elder abuse and neglect are four times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home and three times more likely to be admitted to a hospital.

Throughout Ohio, there are many counties that do not have even one worker dedicated to APS. Often, the responsibility for providing adult protective services for those who are 60 and older has been passed off to already strained Child Protective Services workers. While there are some similarities between these two protective programs, there are significant differences. This is unfair to both the staff and to all of us who only want to live healthy, engaged and secure lives and access the supports we need in our homes and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you have.



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