



Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

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**Testimony before the Ohio Senate
Finance Committee: Health and Medicaid Subcommittee
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Presented by:

**Cindy Farson
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Board of Directors: Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about H.B. 166, and specifically the Senior Community Services program that is part of the Department of Aging's budget. My name is Cindy Farson. I am the Executive Director of the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging 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 mission-driven primarily not-for-profit organizations that operate a complex service delivery system that provides access to community-based, in-home and elder rights services to older Ohioans and people with disabilities.

We are granted 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 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. 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 elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Among the social structures we rely on to connect us as we age is Ohio's Senior Community Services program (ALI 490-411). 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 supports meet an immediate need, and most importantly prevent social isolation by connecting us to our communities. Area Agencies on Aging leverage many different resources to meet the needs of older people in our communities.

Low cost and less intensive interventions through Senior Community Services also:

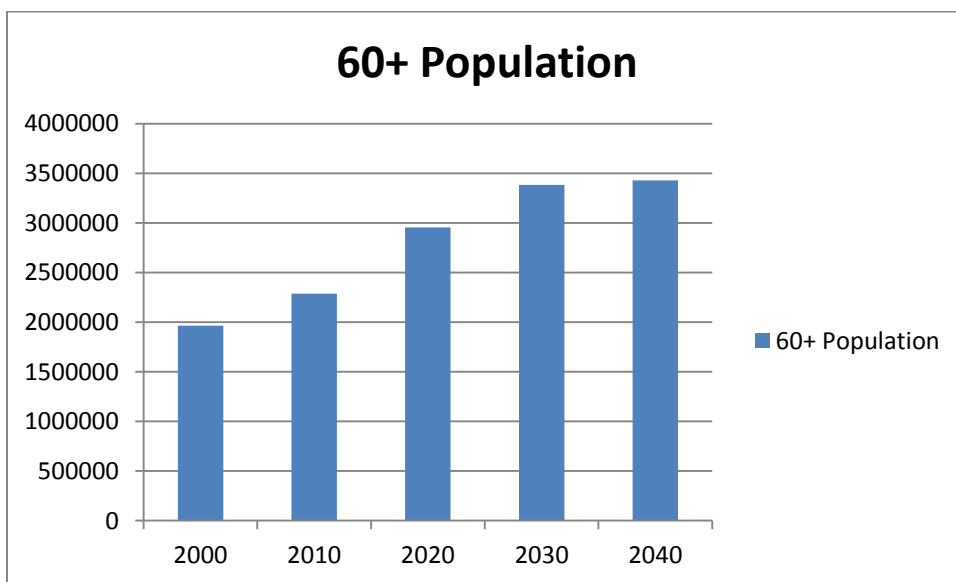
- Delay and divert from enrollment in Medicaid,
- Address determinants of long-term poverty (Housing, Nutrition, Transportation, etc.),
- Enhance health and wellness programming (Healthy U, Matter of Balance),
- Support family caregivers,
- Include high risk and diverse populations (opioid crisis, rural capacity); and
- Maximize new and existing Medicare benefits.

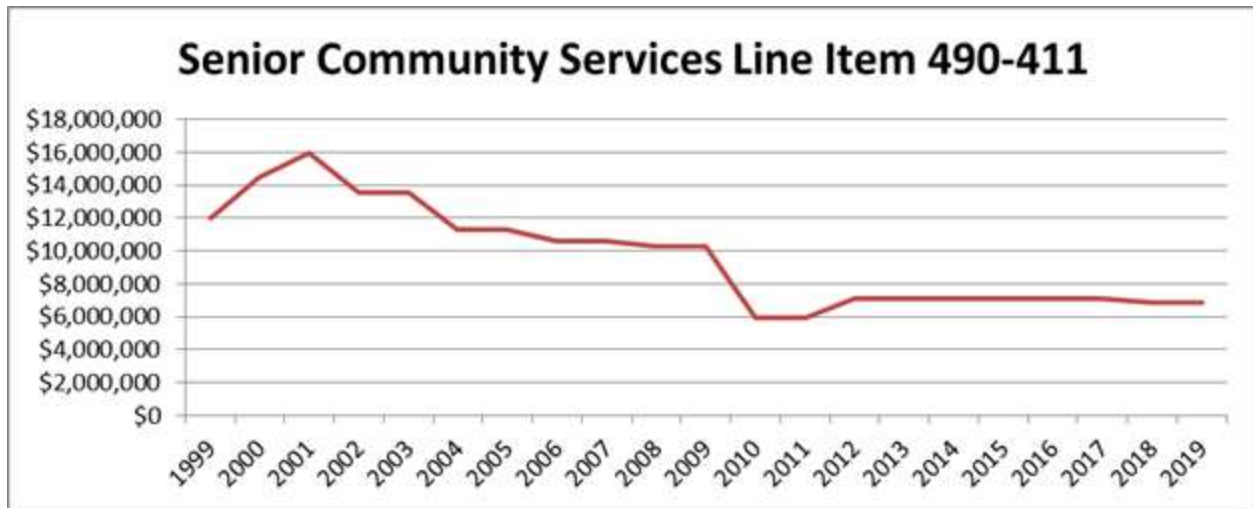
My agency, the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, works closely with primary partners in each of our 8 counties to serve older residents who are not yet facing the need for Medicaid-based home and community services or don't qualify. We provide low cost, less intensive interventions - things that folks need to stay home and engaged with their community for as long as they can such as home delivered meals, transportation and personal care. When the Senior Community Services funding was reduced over the years by more than half our

partners felt those cuts. We were unable to provide the same level of service to the community. My staff that go out to individuals' homes, our assessors, who help individuals by identifying what resources are available, felt those cuts because it limited the options they could offer people. We would like to restore these valuable, cost effective services.

We hear often from counties who struggle with their Adult Protective Service cases. Due to a longstanding lack of sufficient resources for APS, they just don't have the services to put in place for those they are trying to help out of situations of abuse and neglect. Services can help stabilize survivors of elder abuse and neglect and ultimately, we hope that they can reduce the risk of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation in the future. The Senior Community Services program is an important resource that enables our agency to work with APS to link services to these individuals, but we are not able to do it with the limited funding available and the continuation of cuts.

As you can see from the charts in my testimony, we have more Ohioans living longer lives. We see this as a positive thing; we call it Ohio's Longevity Era. Unfortunately, at the same time, the Senior Community Services program has experienced cuts of over 50% in the last several years.





With a modest additional increase in the program, we can explore and expand innovative ways to deliver services that facilitate those important connections to community in a way that meets our local needs. **I ask that you support an additional \$1.9 million over the House version of HB 166 to bring the Senior Community Services program to the pre-recession level of \$10 million per year.**

- Examples of Current/Potential Innovations:*
- *Elder Abuse Victim Outreach – Area Agency on Aging 3 (Lima)*
 - *Intergenerational Congregate Meals – Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging (Mansfield)*
 - *Transportation Coordination – Area Agency on Aging 3 (Lima)*
 - *Care Coordination – Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging*
 - *Meals as You Mend – Area Agency on Aging 9 (Cambridge)*
 - *Housing Transition Care Coordination – Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging*
 - *Direct Care/Personal Care Workforce Recruitment*

We greatly appreciate the Governor’s proposal which includes an increase of \$1.2 million per year that will be exclusively allocated to a statewide initiative by the Department of Aging to enhance and expand the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. The current Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program is not available statewide due to a variety of factors, including limited

federal funds for the program. While we support the existing program, we are concerned about the Department using its discretion to essentially earmark limited state funds toward this effort.

Older Ohioans currently have needs that are going unmet. In some regions there are waiting lists for home delivered meals. Transportation programs are struggling to be able to serve those who need it most. Diverting Senior Community Services resources to a state pilot program is contrary to the longstanding spirit and intent of the program – to give Area Agencies on Aging the ability to leverage their resources to meet the existing, identified needs of older Ohioans in their local communities. If an AAA determines that needs are best met by starting a Senior Farmers Market program, or to expand an existing program, with the current flexibility of the Senior Community Services line item, they can choose to do that with the extra funds. To be clear, as it stands right now, the current \$1.2 million increase included in the House version of the budget would not be available to all the Area Agencies on Aging to meet the needs of their communities. It would essentially be earmarked by ODA for their development of Senior Farmers Market expansion in areas that are not currently running a program. Area Agencies on Aging should have the ability to make determinations where resources should be allocated in the best interest of their communities.

Medicaid HCBS Waivers:

For 40 years, Area Agencies on Aging have expanded meaningful, cost-effective options to live healthy, engaged, secure lives in our homes and communities. Our efforts saved the state an estimated \$12 billion, even before managed care entered this space with MyCare Ohio.

PASSPORT and Assisted Living are Medicaid home and community-based (HCBS) waiver programs that have successfully enabled thousands of us to thrive in our homes and communities each year. We have promoted and implemented new services, improved access, and tested innovative approaches to expand and promote these programs.

The House version of the budget includes 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. We are appreciative of these increased investments. It is an important acknowledgement by House members of the positive impact of home and community-based waiver programs on healthy aging outcomes, and a healthy state budget as we look to the future.

Right now, the 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. Wages for workers average around \$9.50 an hour.

Without the ability to provide the services, eligible participants are turned away or disenrolled, and are forced to turn to options much more expensive to the state – nursing facilities supported by Medicaid. 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 need forward thinking, common sense solutions to address what will otherwise become an unsustainable model for long term services and supports, putting our state's fiscal health, and the health of all of us as we age, at great risk. Realigning Ohio's investment so that we have parity for home and community-based services as well as nursing facilities, with a concerted effort to greatly increase home and community based placement, and promote an emphasis on workforce and small business development for personal care aides, is a path we encourage you to adopt.

We support proposals to increase the assisted living waiver rates put forth by the Ohio Assisted Living Association and other organizations, and increased investment in personal care services in the PASSPORT program. We also believe that the state needs a longer term strategic plan that looks at all aspects of the workforce and the need, with specific strategies for building capacity for these important supports.

We must ensure adequate funding and system resources are dedicated to the full spectrum of supports to enable us all to live healthy, engaged and secure lives as we age in our homes and communities. We ask that you support an investment of an additional \$1.9 million per year over the House version of HB 166 to bring the Senior Community Services program to the pre-recession level of \$10 million per year so that we can bolster and reinforce the effectiveness of the Senior Community Services program, and we ask that the program retain the flexibility to meet local needs.

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