

Testimony before the
OHIO SENATE
FINANCE COMMITTEE
Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid

Respectively Submitted By:

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On behalf of:

Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging

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Child Enrichment Services • Family Support Services • Senior Enrichment Services • Shelter and Emergency Services

Thank you Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Huffman, and Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid for this opportunity to testify in support of increasing the Senior Community Services Line Item (ALI 490-411) in the Ohio Departments of Aging's Budget from the proposed \$8.1 million to \$10 million for the next two years.

My name is Amy Anderson and I am the Director of the Senior Enrichment Services for Neighborhood Alliance in Lorain County. Neighborhood Alliance has been serving Lorain County since 1927 with an inspired mission of enhancing neighborhoods. Neighborhood Alliance continues to expand its programs and services to address the diverse and changing needs of families and individuals alike. One of the ways we do this is supporting seniors in our county. We offer supportive services, caregiver support, and socialization at the Oberlin Senior Center as well as Home Delivered Meals.

In 2018, five staff drivers provided consistency delivering 5 meals a week for a total of 81,116 Home Delivered Meals (HDM) to over 500 unduplicated older adults throughout Lorain County. In 2015 we had 80 clients 60 and older waiting to receive HDM. Today, we have 450 people waiting to receive Home Delivered Meals which is an eighty-two percent increase in less than four years. Of the 450 people waiting to receive meals 177 are what we classify as emergency clients. Fifty-five percent of these emergency clients are aged 80 and older and have been referred from Adult Protective Services, social workers from the V.A., hospitals and hospices in our county as well as concerned family members. How many more of Ohio's seniors will be suffering from food insecurity in four more years?

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What we do know is that in 2035 we must be prepared to address the population shift for the first time in the nation's history, when the population of adults 65 and older will outnumber children younger than 18 according to AARP Livable Communities. The basic need of one hot meal a day is not the only provision our drivers provide. Steve, a 93 year old veteran, is a retired steel worker and has lived in Lorain all of his life. His driver Phil takes out his trash and brings in his paper daily, since Steve is no longer able to navigate the stairs. What will happen to the growing veteran population as they age and are no longer able to cook for themselves or do a simple task of retrieving their paper?

Prolonged isolation and loneliness increase abuse and exploitation of seniors, and have a health risk equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Here is Richard's story. Richard, a client in his 80's who's on oxygen, receives HDM. Jimmy, his consistent long-term driver, knows that Richard is blind. He also expects Richard to be home daily to receive his meal. Occasionally, in order to feel less isolated, Richard takes a walk. He keeps track of where he is by counting driveways with his cane. Recently, Richard miscounted the driveways and got lost. On this particular day, when Richard didn't answer the door Jimmy called Richard's cell phone. When Richard answered, he said, "Jimmy I'm lost. Can you come and find me?" Jimmy found Richard three blocks from home, and Richard said that Jimmy had saved his life.

How many more Steves and Richards might be on our waiting list right now?

For the health and wellbeing of our aging population, I urge you to support the increase in the Ohio Departments of Aging's Budget from the proposed \$8.1 million to \$10 million.