



Western Reserve

Area Agency on Aging

Testimony before the

**OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Respectively Submitted By:
Frank Weglarz, Chair
Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging
Five County Advisory Council**

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Thank you Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Palmer, Ranking Member Crawly and members of the Finance Committee, for the opportunity to testify in support of increasing the Senior Community Services line item (ALI 490-411) in the Ohio Department of Aging's proposed budget in House Bill 110.

My name is Frank Weglarz, Chair of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging's (WRAAA's) Five County Advisory Council. WRAAA serves older adults and individuals with disabilities in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina counties. I am also a volunteer for the Lake County Council on Aging and a Volunteer Adult Guardian with the Lake County Probate Court and Lifeline.

Senior Community Services funding support older adults in the community for as long as possible, rather than a more expensive alternative such as a nursing home. These non-Medicaid funds augment federal Older Americans Act funding for services such as home delivered meals, transportation, personal care services and more. The funding allows the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to delay and divert an individual from enrolling into Medicaid, address social determinants of long-term poverty, target high-risk and diverse populations and support family caregivers.

Over the past 20 years, Senior Community Services funding has been reduced not keeping pace with inflation, population growth and demand for services. House Bill 110 proposed increasing the line item to \$8.7 million compared to almost \$16 million in SFY 2001. The proposed budget slightly increases funding that will go towards expanding the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program statewide. We are advocating for \$1.3 million increase for a total of \$10 million per year to

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help those in most need. Funding should be provided to the AAAs, without carve outs, to meet local community needs.

As a volunteer who delivers meals, I am concerned with the growing problem of isolation and loneliness among the aging population heightened during the pandemic. Home and community based services, such as home delivered meals, not only addresses food insecurity but may provide the only human contact the older adult has that day. Hot meal program numbers have grown dramatically since the pandemic. For example, the Lake County Council on Aging served approximately 990 home delivered meals a day prior to the pandemic and now provides approximately 1,125 meals a day. That is a 12 % increase. When restaurants, senior centers, and congregate dining room closed, we created drive-throughs to distribute meals. This increased our meal distribution by 48% in 2020 over 2019.

We cannot underestimate the power of being socially connected. I've experienced this power many times in my work with older adults. For the past six years, I have delivered hot nutritious meals to the frail, homebound elderly. On a chilly rainy morning one of my clients did not answer the door. His door was partially open and I could hear him. I looked in and found him incoherent on the floor. He was obviously distressed. I notified our Lake County Council on Aging who called the rescue squad. I waited with him until the paramedics arrived. The next day I was told he had a stroke. I'm not sure what the outcome would have been had no one came to his door that day. Another client is a lonely man who likes to have a little chat about our heritage. He's Finnish and I'm Polish. I try to share a few extra minutes with him because he really seems to enjoy our discussions. The pandemic has really escalated the problem of isolation and loneliness.

According to the U.S. Census, Ohio is ranked 7th in the country for the number of individuals 60 and older and our population continues to grow. Now is the time to fully invest in home and community-based services system to ensure the older adults can remain in their home, where they want to be, with access to services to enable them to remain safe, healthy and engaged in their communities.

Thank you Finance Committee members for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 110 on behalf of Ohio's vulnerable older adults.

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