

June 18, 2024

Representative Adam Mathews, Chair
Ohio House of Representatives Public Health Policy Committee
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Chair Mathews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Public Policy Committee:

Thank you for accepting the Ohio Department of Aging's interested party testimony on HB 397, Representative Hoops and Baker's bill to increase education, awareness, and understanding of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease, and other types of dementia. The bill requires the Department of Health, alongside the Department of Aging, the Commission on Minority Health, and community-based organizations to work together and further develop dementia awareness information in public health outreach campaigns.

As the Director of the Department of Aging (ODA), Ohio's federally designated State Unit on Aging, I lead the development of programs and services to address the needs of 2.8 million older Ohioans and work to increase the capacity of our long-term care system. As the state with the sixth-most residents over age 65, Ohio is also home to 225,000 people living with Alzheimer's disease. According to the Alzheimer's Association, this number is expected to increase to 250,000 next year. Ohioans living with dementia and cognitive decline receive the care they need in their homes, community settings, and in long-term care facilities by both informal and formal caregivers.

The impact that Alzheimer's disease and other dementias have on families, loved ones, and paid caregivers is immense and growing. As the country continues to age, we know more people will experience significant dementia-related challenges. Approaching dementia through the lens of public health, in addition to healthcare, is vital to bringing everyone together to tackle the crisis we face. HB 397 will not only increase awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias across the state, but this bill will also help to elevate the work presently underway.

The Department of Aging and Ohio's aging network are working diligently to address the needs of this at-risk population. With the support of the General Assembly, ODA acts in collaboration with advocacy groups, providers, experts, researchers, and governmental entities. This collaboration offers more services with new funding streams, invests in programs that support aging in place, and builds out resources for all caregivers to train and sustain them in their challenging line of work. Ohio's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Task Force set the state on the right path toward greater advocacy and efficacy of dementia care, care coordination, and availability of critical services. Since its sunset, ODA has aligned its goals with the work of the Task Force, including:

- The opening of the [Golden Buckeye Center for Dementia Caregiving](#), a first-of-its kind facility whose goal is developing and empowering a dementia-prepared caregiver workforce in Ohio
- Establishing an add-on Memory Care Service under the Assisted Living Waiver for eligible Medicaid enrollees

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- An additional \$1.8 million in funding for ODA's Alzheimer's and Other Dementias Respite Line, which provides funding for personal care, adult day, respite, education, and related supportive services to Ohio's area agencies on aging and the Ohio Alzheimer's Association Chapters
- Expansion of the Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly ([PACE](#)) to nine counties, aiding the 50% of PACE participants who are diagnosed with dementia or cognitive decline
- \$8 million in funding for [adult day settings](#) across the state, with \$2 million providing direct, targeted relief to adult day settings who care for those experiencing cognitive decline and live at home or with working family caregivers

ODA's [Action Plan on Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias](#) supplements these achievements and further guides the department on additional obtainable goals and objectives. As the needs of Ohioans with dementia increase and diversify, we recognize more must be done, but a strong foundation has been set for us to continue to build an infrastructure that is sustainable.

From a more proactive approach, the ODA [Healthy Aging Grants](#) approved by the current operating budget are also making positive impacts for people with dementia in our communities. A great example of this is Licking County's Open Minds through Art program, an intergenerational program connecting clients who have dementia and college students. Together they are creating art that will later be auctioned to provide more resources and services to the community. This program supports ODA's [State Plan on Aging](#) priority of social connectedness. We are encouraged by the ingenuity of this program and look forward to sharing future Healthy Aging Grant successes in the coming months.

We are hopeful that this bill will draw greater attention to funding opportunities to address the crisis we face in ensuring care and care coordination for a growing number of vulnerable Ohioans, their loved ones, and caregivers.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. If I can be of any additional assistance, please contact my Legislative Liaison, Alex Lapso, at alapso@age.ohio.gov.

In Service,



Ursel J. McElroy