

Memo

To: Sara P. Carruthers, Chair, Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

From: Orion Bell, CEO, Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging

Date: February 23, 2023

Subject: Testimony in support of H. B. 33

This testimony is provided in support of proposed operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024-2025 proposed by the Department of Aging.

Background:

Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging is a Cleveland-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to support caregivers and empower all people to age well through research, consumer-responsive services and client advocacy. Established in 1908, the Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging provides counseling, housing, health and wellness services for older adults and family caregivers in Ohio and across the United States. In addition, we are an independent, applied research institution that conducts research studies related to everyday issues faced by older people and their families. We use this knowledge to develop innovative solutions and foster informed engagement on issues impacting the field of aging. In 2022, more than 150,000 individuals accessed a service provided by Benjamin Rose.

Aging in Ohio

Across the United States, older adults, those persons ages 60 and older, are the fastest growing population segment. It is estimated that by 2030, the number of older adults will exceed the number of school-aged children. As noted in the information provided by the Department of Aging:

- About 40% of older Ohioans with severe disabilities are cared for through a combination of family members and by purchasing some help using private funds. The public and private costs are considerable and are projected to increase substantially over the next two decades. By 2040, Scripps Gerontology researchers at Miami University estimate that Ohio will have more than 260,000 older people with severe disability affecting activities of daily living and if the current use rates continue that would result in some 130,000 older Ohioans needing long-term aging services supported by Medicaid.

- Ohio counties are fast aging. In the year 2000, none of Ohio counties with more residents over age 60 than under age 20. By the end of 2020, nearly 50% of the counties have flipped. The 85 and up, those who are more likely to be frailer and with more physical and health needs, are projected to increase by 51% by 2040.
- Because federal policy addresses the growing number of older people requiring long-term services primarily through Medicaid, older people must become impoverished to receive assistance. More than nine in ten older Ohioans are not eligible for Medicaid, nor are they interested in relying on the program. However, when health and long-term needs become so great that personal and family resources are depleted, Medicaid becomes the dominant fall back for many.

Community Supports

With more than 110 years of experience in meeting the needs of older adults, the Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging has documented the impact and effectiveness of home and community-based supports in promoting the health and wellbeing of older adults and the family and friend caregivers who support them. Some recent examples include:

- ***Nutrition Solution***, a “food as medicine” model that provides nutritionally tailored meals for high-risk individuals based on specific diagnoses, (including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes or renal disease), has been demonstrated to improve health outcomes, reduce hospital readmissions and emergency room visits. This program addresses food insecurity and social isolation, as well as reduces the cost of care for program participants.
- ***BRI-Care Consultation***, an evidence-based caregiver support program developed by Benjamin Rose and utilized in Ohio and in 35 markets across the country, provides support and counseling services for family and friend caregivers: those individuals who provide the informal, and uncompensated, support for their loved ones and are the critical component of the ability of a frail, vulnerable older adults or person with a significant disability to successfully “age in place”. BRI-CC has been demonstrated in multiple studies to reduce caregiver burden, improve health outcomes for caregivers and those in their care, and reduce the use of institutional care. The program was initially developed to address the needs of caregivers of persons living with dementia but has also been successfully adapted to meet the needs of those caring for loved ones with other chronic health conditions, including Parkinson’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, persons with developmental disabilities, as well as community-dwelling individuals living alone with some level of cognitive impairment.

The programs noted above are examples of community-based supports that promote independence and dignity among older adult populations. Other services, including chore programs, minor home modifications or consumer-directed care management programs that educate individuals on how to manage their chronic health conditions, have also been demonstrated to promote better health outcomes, reduce fall risk, promote better self-care and reduce hospitalizations and institutional care. These services and others can be expanded through the support of the Healthy Aging Grants proposed in the Governor’s budget.

Community Specific

Ohio’s communities vary widely in population, resources and access to care. The distribution of Healthy Aging Grants at the county level helps ensure that programs and funding can be

targeted to meet the specific needs of individual communities. By building a stronger statewide network of supports, the Healthy Aging Grants also can foster volunteer and community participation in program design and service delivery. The Healthy Aging Grants can help more communities capitalize on remote access and telehealth programs developed in response to the pandemic and help ensure that all Ohioans have access to services and supports.

Promoting Independence and Reducing Costs

As noted above, most Ohioans do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicaid Waiver services. The supports offered through Medicaid are a godsend for frail and vulnerable Ohioans. It is the source of funding for many nursing home residents. Medicaid Waiver services ensure that a greater number of persons, who otherwise would require institutional care, are able to remain in the communities and the homes of their choice. But, to access these services requires individuals and families to become impoverished due to the health issues they face. It should be our goal to ensure that none of us is ever so poor, or so ill, to qualify for Medicaid. The Healthy Aging Grants can provide an important tool to promote the health, wellness, dignity and independence of our vulnerable neighbors, and the people who care about them.

Thank you for your consideration.

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