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## **TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO HOUSE FINANCE HHS SUBCOMMITTEE**

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Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio  
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Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee for allowing me to provide testimony on HB 33, Ohio's proposed 2024-2025 Operating Budget.

My name is Nan Cahall and I am here representing the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, commonly known as COA. Founded in 1971, COA is the state designated Area Agency on Aging, serving Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties. As an Area Agency on Aging, we are part of the national aging service network. We are pleased and proud to be testifying before two of our region's legislators, Chairwoman Caruthers and Representative Schmidt. We do want to commend the entire sub-committee for your time and ear during these many lengthy hearings. Thank you.

You have heard testimony from our state association, o4a, and many other interested parties on the specifics of the budget allocations. I am here to tell you about aging southwestern Ohioans, the services they are provided through federal and state funded programs as well as significant needs that remain unmet due to many contributing factors, the biggest of which is low wages in a competitive workforce environment.

COA's mission is to enhance lives by assisting people to remain independent through a range of quality services. Our programs and services impact people of all ages and the effects are felt throughout our community. We help people stay in their homes and communities, complete smooth transitions from one care setting to another, and connect to unbiased information, advice and community resources.

### Aging in Southwest Ohio:

- Nearly 365,000 adults aged 60 and over live in our five-county region
- This includes 33,000 people 85+
- From 2010 to 2050, our region's 85+ population will double (those most likely to need care)

Each year, we help make it possible for more than 26,000 older adults and people with disabilities to remain independent. To do this, we provide basic yet essential services

including meals, transportation and help with personal care and housekeeping. Traditionally, many of these services have been provided by home health aides and other members of the direct care workforce. This critical workforce also helps fill in gaps in care for family caregivers who are juggling multiple responsibilities, including young families and careers. As you have heard, this workforce is shrinking and cannot keep up with the demand for its services. The biggest driver of this labor shortage is wages.

Older adults, caregivers and the network of service providers who rely on this critical workforce are suffering. Older adults experience long delays and inconsistencies with their care – or go without. Family caregivers are pulled from other responsibilities to provide care. Home health agencies that hire these workers and then contract with Council on Aging to deliver in-home services to eligible older adults are unable to find the staff needed to meet the demand. Some have shut down permanently.

There are currently 2,207 vulnerable, disabled older adults waiting for a home care provider in southwest Ohio. The average wait time to find a provider has grown to 190 days. In some areas, the wait time is much longer.

What does that mean when a client is waiting for a home care provider:

MyCare Ohio client Bonnie, 85, from Clermont County lives alone and has been going without services for months because of the aide shortage. Though they provide as much help as they can, her children work or don't live nearby. They can't meet all of her needs. Bonnie has been enrolled in MyCare Ohio for many years. For much of this time, she received in-home care through one provider. But several years ago, this provider decided to stop contracting with MyCare Ohio. Since that time, it has been difficult to find consistent aide services for Bonnie – she needs only nine hours of care each week to help her live independently. What is frustrating for Bonnie is that her previous provider still comes to her apartment building to serve older adults enrolled in non-waiver programs which are able to provide more competitive pay rates.

Butler County PASSPORT participant Connie, 80, lives alone with no friends or family for support. She needs assistance with bathing but has not received personal care services for six months. As a result, she's been giving herself a sponge bath.

Direct care workers, including home health aides, have left their jobs in search of stability, higher wages and opportunities for advancement.

These obstacles are also what have kept new workers away.

- \$21,000 median earnings per year – average hourly rate of \$12/hour
- 48% live in or near poverty
- 32% lack available housing
- 88% are women
- 41% are people of color
- 11% are uninsured

In addition to this advocacy, Council on Aging has been working to find innovative solutions to the workforce shortage, including:

- offering additional support and training to family caregivers
- using non-traditional providers to deliver services, such as laundry services
- and using technology to expand opportunities for older adults and families to find and hire their own home care workers

As an example, we requested and received federal funding to develop an app that helps those who need care connect with those willing to provide it. Called AddnAide, the app helps address the critical direct care worker shortage by tapping the efficiency of technology and the connectivity of social media.

We launched AddnAide last summer as a pilot in our levy-funded programs, including a marketing campaign designed to attract new and non-traditional workers to the workforce. We're already seeing results. Older adults who've been waiting for in-home services are connecting with members of our community who are able to provide the care they need.

Our Ask: invest in a workforce that provides critical services to vulnerable Ohioans

- 50% increase in PASSPORT personal care rates
  - Including a \$20 an hour wage for direct care workers
  - Creates a level playing field across programs seeking similar workers – rate parity across all Medicaid providers
- Reduced regulation:
  - Expand consumer directed care options
    - Simplified requirements
    - Consider innovative options such as AddnAide

In closing, I again want to thank you for your attention today and your service to Ohioans.