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**Written Testimony on House Bill 33
Senate Finance Committee
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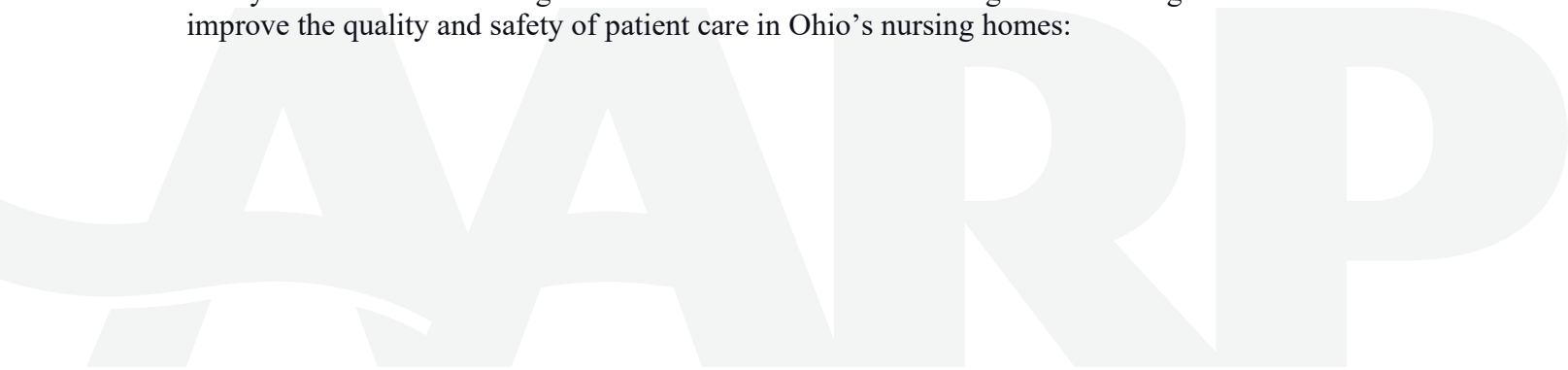
Greetings Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Kalitha Williams, and I serve as Outreach & Advocacy Manager for AARP Ohio and am responsible for leading the state office's public policy agenda. As you are aware, AARP, with 1.5 million members in Ohio, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps empower people to choose how they live as they age, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families, such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities, and protection from financial abuse.

AARP is here today to offer recommendations for nursing home reform measures, reinforce the need for the Health Aging Grants program, support additional funding requested by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services for Adult Protective Services, and promote implementing a SNAP Minimum Benefit.

Nursing Home Reform Measures

AARP has been a strong voice for consumers in nursing homes and their caregivers, highlighting the industry's need for transparency and accountability. A recent survey of Ohioans 45 and over found that 74% of the respondents want improvements to Ohio's long-term care services. [1] With nearly 1 in 4 COVID-19 deaths in Ohio from nursing homes residents and staff, the pandemic demonstrated the critical need for transparency and accountability of the industry. [2] In 2022 alone, nursing homes were awarded hundreds of millions of dollars of state funding with few guardrails to ensure the additional resources would directly improve patient care. The House version of the budget goes further and awards even more resources, including expanding taxpayer dollars to long-term care facilities that do not even serve patients who receive Medicaid. While we do not dispute the funding increases, we assert that the industry should be held accountable for the resources it receives and provide transparency to demonstrate that taxpayer dollars are being used to improve patient care.

Today we offer the following recommendations to ensure nursing home funding is directed to improve the quality and safety of patient care in Ohio's nursing homes:



- **Require all Ohio-licensed nursing homes to provide annual, audited financial statements, verifying they are using a direct care payment ratio of no less than 90% to ensure the majority of nursing home revenue is spent on direct care for residents.** Transparency into the actual operating costs of Ohio nursing homes is essential for legislators, regulators, residents and family caregivers, and all other stakeholders, including advocates. Ohio should enhance cost reporting rules and systems to require nursing homes to demonstrate how much revenue spending is actually going towards direct resident care through fully audited, consolidated cost reports and financial statements that cover the nursing facility parent organization, down to the nursing home, and including all related parties. The consolidated financial statements would facilitate greater transparency into operating costs, industry profit margins, and the percentage of dollars spent on direct resident care. Other states have adopted and are implementing similar direct care payment ratio requirements.
- **Increased wages, better job quality and additional education and training opportunities are needed to strengthen the direct care workforce.** Much has been shared about the need to increase wages for direct care employees. While we agree this is a critical issue that needs addressing, it is only one part of building a sufficient, stable, and well-trained long-term care direct care workforce. Ohio must address and improve three aspects of direct care work simultaneously. These areas are compensation (i.e., wages and benefits), education and training, and job satisfaction. Only addressing one or two of these aspects will not produce the strong and lasting results we need to solve the growing shortage of direct care workers. Ohio's direct care workers provide essential support to our state's most vulnerable citizens. They deserve an integrated approach that includes appropriate compensation and good jobs, including livable wages, health insurance, paid leave, consistent assignment, full-time hours (where desired), flexible and portable training, advancement opportunities, and job improvements that provide opportunities to be valued as a respected member of the care team, including supportive supervisors and real input into care planning, management decisions, and quality improvement.
- **Include findings from Ohio Governor's Nursing Home Quality & Accountability Taskforce final report with nursing home reform efforts or funding in the budget.**

As we mentioned earlier, a recent survey of Ohioans 45 and over found that the majority of respondents want improvements to Ohio's long-term care services. [\[3\]](#) We applaud Governor DeWine's fortitude in creating and implementing the Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Taskforce. Through the leadership of the Ohio Department of Aging, the Taskforce has been to every corner of the state, listening to the Ohioans share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences to improve our state's nursing homes. Nursing home providers are not the only stakeholders in ensuring our long-term care facilities offer the highest quality.

- Nursing home residents, their families and caregivers, and workers also have important insights to share, and the Taskforce has been directly engaging them for solutions. The Taskforce's findings will provide invaluable insights. They must be included in budget deliberations to ensure the voices of all stakeholders are heard and considered when developing nursing home reform and funding efforts in our state.

Support Health Aging Grants

AARP Ohio is here today to express our support for the SFY 24-25 Ohio Department of Aging budget proposal in HB33, specifically the Healthy Aging Grants. We support policies that increase options allowing older Ohioans to choose how they want to age. According to the Ohio Department of Aging, our state has 2.5 million residents over the age of 60, with the 60-plus population growing more than 20 times faster than Ohio's overall population. A recent AARP Ohio survey also found that more than 80 percent of adults have expressed a desire to remain in their homes and communities as they age and prefer a home setting over a nursing home or other institutional setting. [4] In fact, aging in place is extremely important to a majority of Ohio residents age 45+; however, nearly two-thirds have real concerns regarding the affordability to do so. [5]

AARP is fighting to support America's nearly 48 million family caregivers who help make it possible for older Americans and other loved ones to live independently at home—where they want to be. In 2017, about 1.5 million Ohioans provided an estimated 1.3 million hours of unpaid care to an adult loved one, with limitations in daily activities. The estimated economic value of their unpaid contributions was about \$1.7 billion in 2017. Older adults and people with disabilities overwhelmingly prefer to remain at home and receive care in the community for as long as possible, and family caregivers who help their loved ones remain at home count on quality services to be provided to their loved ones. The additional funding in House Bill 33 makes this possible for more Ohioans.

Demand for home and community-based services (HCBS) is expected to increase as the number of Ohioans in the 65+ population grows. And as this same group grows older, they also have a greater need for long-term services and support. Most people who receive HCBS are older adults and people of all ages with disabilities. In 2018, for example, about 12.6 million American adults living in the community needed LTSS, and more than half (6.7 million) were over age 65. [6]

Increase funding for Adult Protective Services.

For far too long, local communities have not had the resources they need to investigate when older Ohioans are suspected victims of abuse. The State Legislature recently passed important laws to protect older Ohioans from telecommunications fraud and created penalties for mandatory reporters that fail to report evidence of elder abuse. The annual **\$4 million** increase requested for the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services helps ensure resources are in place to enforce critical policy safeguards. Combining strong laws with robust funding demonstrates our state's commitment to protecting Ohio's growing population of older adults.

Institute SNAP Minimum Benefit of \$50

Inflation and rising food costs stretch the household budgets of older workers and retirees living on fixed incomes. In 2019, half of all Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households had at least one older adult, and 77% of SNAP participants with an adult age 50 or older lived alone. [7] Providing low-income older Ohioans with a minimum \$50 monthly SNAP Benefits will help with food insecurity.

If our state is to fulfill its bold vision that "Ohio is the best place to age in the nation," then we must ensure robust funding to empower and protect older Ohioans so they can thrive. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.

[1] AARP Research Vital Voices: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00351.250>

[2] COVID-19 Nursing Home Resident and Staff Deaths: AARP Nursing Home Dashboard. <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/issues/caregiving/info-2020/nursing-home-covid-states.html>

[3] AARP Research Vital Voices: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00351.250>

[4] Home and Community-Based Long-Term Services and Supports for Older Adults - AARP Public Policy Institute LTSS Choices

Spotlight: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2021/11/home-and-community-based-services-for-older-adults.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00153.001.pdf>

[5] 2 AARP Research Vital Voices: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00351.250>

[6] Home and Community-Based Long-Term Services and Supports for Older Adults - AARP Public Policy Institute LTSS Choices

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[7] Millions of Adults Ages 50 and Older Rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2021/12/millions-of-adults-rely-on-snap.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00106.002.pdf>