



Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Sylvia Pla-Raith, Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services
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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.B. 33 and, in particular, the Adult Protective Services program that is part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' budget (ALI 600-534). My name is Sylvia Pla-Raith and I am the former chair and a current member of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services. I also serve as the Director of the Ohio Attorney General's Elder Justice Unit and am the past Chief of Adult Protective Services in Cuyahoga County.

The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services (OCAPS) is a statewide coalition whose purpose is to maximize protection and dignity of older adults through collaboration, education, and advocacy on behalf of older Ohioans at risk or are survivors of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Members include county adult protective services workers, state and nonprofit agencies and community members.

We are here today to ask the House's proposed increased investment of \$4M be maintained for Adult Protective Services in H.B. 33. The increase will enable local communities to make more connections, strengthen existing connections and to find better ways to respond quickly to elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. The last state budget provided the highest amount of GRF ever provided to APS: \$5.72M per year, which was designed to provide every county with, at a minimum, one FTE at \$65,000 per county to receive reports, conduct investigations, and, when possible, arrange protective services for older adults who are victims of exploitation, abuse, and neglect. In addition to allowing more dedicated staff to focus on APS, this enabled counties to increase the number of services to stabilize victims.

The proposed increase in the county Adult Protective Services line of \$4 Million per SFY will bring the total line item to \$9.72M per year, statewide, for both screenings, investigations, and protective services. We endorse the proposed distribution of these funds: \$7.04M to be distributed as a flat \$80,000 per county, to recognize the increased cost of an FTE (currently \$80 - \$85, 0000 with benefits); and the remainder distributed via formula.

Adult protective services is a system that is intended to be more responsive to our communities and to be better able to respond quickly to elder abuse and neglect. The proposed investment will help counties meet the vast need for emergency services such as housing assistance, prescription drug assistance, transportation to medical care and food assistance for vulnerable older adults – all of which are exacerbated by social isolation and financial scams targeting older adults that remain prevalent.

Between SFY 2018 through SFY 2020 we saw an increase from 20,000 reports of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation statewide, to nearly 34,000, a 68.9% increase. We have seen steadily increasing reports in the past year with a 17% increase in exploitation reports. Investigating exploitation can be complicated and time-consuming. It involves coordinating collaboration between the state, adult protective services, financial institutions, and local law enforcement to protect victims of financial

exploitation. Confidentiality requirements of each system, corporate processes and varying practices with local law enforcement make this an ongoing challenge.

Currently, there is no other dedicated source of funding for adult protective services in Ohio other than this state line item in the job and family services budget. While some communities are able to leverage local dollars to further support the system, it puts undue pressure on the community to deal with competing important priorities and results in a distinct disparity in capacity between those counties with the means to further subsidize the system compared to those who cannot.

We believe in a just society that recognizes that all people are equal. No matter how old we are, we are entitled to be treated as full members of our communities. Adult protective services is among the supports we rely on to be there for us as we age. This support has been bolstered with changes to the law that have improved understanding of elder abuse, included more mandatory reporters, fortified the state and local systems, connected interrelated supports, and modestly increased resources to enable local systems to do more.

The consequences of not having a robust adult protective services system in place to ensure access to justice for us all as we age is significant. Financial losses (annually estimated as \$36.5 billion per year nationally) can bankrupt individuals and even other family members, causing them to turn to publicly funded programs to provide for their basic needs. In fact, one in ten financial abuse victims will turn to Medicaid as a direct result of their own monies being stolen from them. Victims of elder abuse and neglect are four times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home and three times more likely to be admitted to a hospital. Research says that an estimated 170,000 or more cases of elder abuse and neglect occur in Ohio each year, with only a fraction reported to adult protective services. A strong adult protective services system will encourage awareness to help prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation; prompt reporting so interventions can be swift and effective; and better outcomes for both older adults, their families, and the taxpayers.

Often, the responsibility for providing adult protective services for those who are 60 and older has been passed off to already strained child protective services workers. While there are some similarities between these two protective programs, there are significant differences. This is unfair to both the staff and to all of us who only want to live healthy, engaged and secure lives and access the supports we need in our homes and communities.

Protection of older adults and adults with disabilities takes collaboration with courts, law enforcement and available service providers. We ask for increased state support to APS programs so that where an older adult lives does not determine their ability to be protected.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



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