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Written Testimony on House Bill 33

Senate Health Committee

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Greetings Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and distinguished members of the Senate Health Committee My name is Kalitha Williams, and I serve as Outreach & Advocacy Manager for AARP Ohio and am responsible for the 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.

In an earlier hearing before this committee, we offered testimony in support of the Ohio Department of Aging budget proposal for Healthy Aging Grants. **We are here today to offer recommendations for nursing home reform measures and 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 need for transparency and accountability of the industry. 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 industry.¹ It's more important than ever that Ohioans have the most complete and current information to make the most informed decision in selecting a nursing home for themselves or their loved ones. We make the following recommendations to empower Ohioans to make this this critical choice:

- **All Ohio licensed nursing homes must provide annual, audited financial statements that, clearly, disclose their ownership.** In 2022, alone, nursing homes were awarded hundreds of millions of dollars of state funding with few guardrails to ensure the additional

¹ [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](https://www.aarp.org/ppi/issues/caregiving/info-2020/nursing-home-covid-states.html)

resources would, directly, improve patient care. The House version of the budget goes further and awards even more funding and expands taxpayer dollars to long-term care facilities that do not even serve patients that receive Medicaid. While we do not dispute the funding increases, we assert that the industry should be held accountable to the resources it receives and provide transparency to demonstrate that taxpayer dollars are being used to improve patient .

- **Improve and maintain the Ohio Long Term Care Consumer Guide (ltc.ohio.gov) with updated, consumer-friendly information on nursing homes.** Ohioans should have one place to gather information about nursing homes, which includes the status of their licensure, inspection reports, notices of violations, and all nursing home performance data collected by the state. Currently, this information is not fully available to the public without a Freedom of Information Act request. Easy access to this information will help Ohioans make better informed choices on long-term care facility options.
- **Do not finalize nursing home reform efforts or funding until Ohio Governor’s Nursing Home Quality & Accountability Taskforce final report is released.** A recent survey of Ohioans 45 and over found that 74% of the respondents want improvements to Ohio’s long-term care services.² 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 and 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.

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 there are resources in place to enforce important policy safeguards. Combining strong laws with robust funding demonstrates our state’s commitment to protect Ohio’s growing population of older adults.

Institute SNAP Minimum Benefit of \$50

Inflation and the rising costs of food are stretching 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

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

50 or older lived alone.³ 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 offer testimony. I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.

³ 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>