



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

250 East Broad Street, Suite 220
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 481-3511
www.ohioaging.org

TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE

Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy Officer bergfeld@ohioaging.org
Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, I am Kelsey Bergfeld, Chief Policy Officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging.



Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) make it possible for older adults to thrive in their homes and communities by providing options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services, programming, and living arrangements that suit them best. They have over 50 years of experience serving our communities, over 30 years operating the PASSPORT HCBS waiver program and have saved the state an estimated \$12 billion in institutional care.

The Area Agencies on Aging administer and provide case management for the PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and Ohio Home Care waiver programs, waiver service

coordination for MyCare Ohio, and administer Older Americans Act and Senior Community Services programs as well as a variety of county levies and other federal, state and local programs.

They also answer an estimated 300,000 requests for information and referrals annually, and experienced screeners and assessors evaluate individual and family needs and link older Ohioans to cost-effective in-home and community-based programs where they live.

To support the growing needs of older adults across the state, we ask you consider the following amendments to Sub-HB96.

Healthy Aging -> Senior Community Services Program: The Senior Community Services Program provides flexible, community-driven funding to Area Agencies on Aging for non-Medicaid services like home modifications and repairs, transportation, meals, housing assistance, personal care, and other

types of supports that prevent social isolation. Lower cost and less intensive interventions funded through Senior Community Services:

- Delay and divert from enrollment in Medicaid and in more costly nursing home care
- Reduce waiting lists for services
- Enhance health and wellness programming
- Support family caregivers

Senior Community Service dollars fund the same services and programs Healthy Aging grants supported in the last state budget. The Department of Aging did an economic impact study on the Healthy Aging grants and found **for each \$1 invested in healthy aging interventions, the state and local communities received \$3.20 in return.** These services and programs allow older adults to remain safe and healthy in their homes and connected to their communities for as long as possible.

Senior Community Service dollars also serve as the match to federal Older American's Act (OAA) funds. The federal administration's proposed budget breaks up and eliminates many critical aging programs that support older adults. The Senior Community Service program will help fill gaps as our network's ability to meet the needs of those we serve is impacted.

To continue upon the profound outcomes of the Healthy Aging grants and meet the growing need, **we request that the Senate invest in older adults and local communities by increasing the Senior Community Services Program by \$1 million per fiscal year.**

Personal Needs Allowance: The Department of Aging's proposed increase in the nursing facility and Assisted Living personal needs allowance (PNA) will help individuals pay for personal and ancillary expenses not covered by Medicaid like toiletries, haircuts, and clothing; and social and recreational activities. **We ask you to restore the proposed increase in the PNA from \$75 to \$100 per month.**

Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF): Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging provide services and resources for individuals to remain in their homes and communities as they age. Finding affordable and accessible housing options continues to be one of the biggest challenges to accomplishing this, particularly for low-income older adults and those living in rural areas. In recent years, Ohio's AAAs have received millions in multi-county grants from the Ohio Housing Trust Fund to address the housing needs of older adults including modifications and repairs. The proposed county-by-county approach would be inefficient and costly, and hinder AAA's ability to braid and blend funding streams to expand the reach of these much-needed resources. **We ask that you restore the current funding structure of the Ohio Housing Trust Fund and institute a study committee composed of legislators, organizations and representatives of the DeWine Administration to find areas for improvement.**

Waiver Programs: PASSPORT and Assisted Living are Medicaid Home and Community-Based (HCBS) waiver programs that have successfully enabled thousands of older Ohioans to thrive in their homes and

communities each year. We support the Governor's request for sustained support for the PASSPORT and Assisted Living waivers, and the Area Agencies on Aging that administer them.

Our association looks forward to continued conversations about these priorities. With your support, we can all work together to make Ohio the best state in the nation in which to age.