



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO OHIO SENATE MEDICAID COMMITTEE

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Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid 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.

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.**

Provider Rates: Increased reimbursement rates for providers in the last biennial budget have led to increased wages and benefits for direct care workers, better hiring and retention rates, reduced wait lists and more consumers receiving the services they need. The sustainability and regular review of these rates moving forward will be crucial to continue to strengthen and build the capacity of the aging network so all Ohioans can continue to choose how they live as they age. **We support a mechanism by which the state regularly reviews provider payment rates to ensure access to services and more closely reflects the true cost of care.**

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.**

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.

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.**

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.