

Testimony as an Interested Party on HB 74 before the House Finance Committee

Stacey O'Brien, Chair, Council On Older Persons

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Crawley, members of the Ohio House Finance Committee. My name is Stacey O'Brien. I work as Assistant Professor at Ursuline College. I serve as the Chairwoman of the Council on Older Persons (COOP), a 75-year-old standing committee of The Center for Community Solutions. The Center for Community Solutions is a non-partisan, nonprofit public policy think tank that aims to improve health, social and economic conditions through research, policy analysis and communication. COOP's members are 50 representatives from public, non-profit and private sectors who advocate on behalf of issues that affect seniors in Greater Cleveland.

I respectfully provide testimony to address how Ohio's public transit systems and accessible transportation providers are a vital lifeline for older Ohioans.

In the 2015 ODOT Statewide Transit Needs Study, survey respondents prioritized "Creating more ways for older adults and persons with disabilities to get around" as a most important consideration for transit decision-making and financial investments.

By 2030, 26.3 percent of Ohio's citizens will be age 60 or older, according to a report by The Center for Community Solutions.

The ability to drive declines with age, which has measurable impacts on independence and health. On any given day, more than 50 percent of older non-drivers stay home. They make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer shopping trips and 65 percent fewer trips for social, family, religious and life enhancing purposes. Older adults with lower levels of social engagement are at increased risk of loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness are linked to cardiac disease, stroke, and cognitive impairment (Lamanna, Klinger, Liu, & Mirza, 2020; Puckett, 2020). When older Ohioans depend on others for transportation, access to healthcare in particular suffers, which increases the likelihood of poor health outcomes. Their mental health suffers as well, with a loss of personal identity, decreased independence, life satisfaction and lower productivity. (Vivoda, Heeringa, et al.).

Poorer health outcomes among low-income seniors' burdens Ohio's Medicaid program in its efforts to control costs. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the average cost of a semiprivate room in a nursing home is \$6,844 per month, or \$82,128, which includes room, board and some other healthcare services. Community based services and supports – including transportation – can keep older adults safely independent in their own homes longer, delaying the move to a nursing home and the associated costs incurred by Medicaid.

Family caregivers cannot provide the solution for non-driving seniors. AARP estimates that 22 percent of adults aged 45 to 64 cares for a parent. Among those caregivers, 68 percent report making work accommodations to meet caregiving responsibilities: arriving late or leaving early, taking time off, reducing hours or leaving the labor force.

The 2018 National Aging & Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) poll of older adults, adults with disabilities and caregivers on driving and transportation further inform local findings and research:

- 74 percent of older adults who drive have already cut back on driving.
- 68 percent of older adults say finding alternatives to driving is very or somewhat difficult.

- 40 percent of older adults cannot do their activities or chores because they do not drive.
- 39 percent of caregivers spend five or more hours on the transportation of friends or relatives each week.
- Access and availability (40 percent) and affordability (12 percent) are barriers to transportation, particularly for those without a caregiver.

Public transportation presents an opportunity to respond to a challenge that affects nearly one-quarter of Ohio’s citizens, limiting their independence, interfering with their ability to care for their own health and discouraging full participation in their community.

We hope to be a resource as you consider ways to create the transportation system Ohio needs for today and tomorrow. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this important topic.

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