



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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Testimony before the Ohio House of Representatives

Government Oversight Committee

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Presented by:

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Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White and Ranking Minority Member Sweeney, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on House Bill 55.

The Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging is a nonprofit, statewide network of agencies that provides services for older Ohioans, people with disabilities and their families. The Association engages in national and statewide advocacy to address issues which have an impact on the aging and disability network and older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities, provides services to members and serves as a collective voice for Ohio's 12 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities.

COVID-19 has necessitated innovation and transformation in how we all work. Because older people are disproportionately impacted by the disease, Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging quickly mobilized and rallied to ensure continuity of services, to help those newly impacted, and to get necessities to those who needed it most. Our members have risen to the challenge by adjusting their service delivery overnight so that they could identify and meet the needs of individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

The AAAs invested in new technology to enable their call centers to go remote and staff to work from home. AAAs have connected to older adults and their caregivers in new ways. They provide online live programming and web-based alternatives for caregiving support, telephonic caregiver support groups, and social media outreach with wellness tips of the day. Traditional in-person classes have pivoted to online meetings. The adjustments do not replace the benefits of the AAAs' expertise as in-home, eyes-on specialists but they are the best alternative in these extraordinary times and have opened up new ways to improve their reach and have a greater impact.

Similarly, many state and local governments have been able to pivot so that they can conduct the people's work, maintaining transparency and accountability, while keeping people safe, using technology, including holding public meetings virtually and allowing the public to

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participate. This has resulted in more opportunities for individuals who would otherwise have difficulty attending meetings in person to participate in the process even without a pandemic.

The practice of virtual committee testimony as proposed by HB 55 should occur as soon as possible. Virtual testimony would help mitigate potential COVID-19 exposure and spread at the Statehouse while still providing, and improving, access to testify in committees. This is particularly important to those who are at highest risk of adverse effects from COVID-19.

HB 55 would increase accessibility to the legislative process for all Ohioans during this unusual time, especially those who are at higher risk, or who may face barriers such as poor health, lack of appropriate transportation or a caregiver to travel with them, or the inability to leave work. Allowing more access to this process through virtual testimony would allow more older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities to participate in the public process, especially regarding issues that impact them directly. Their stories are important to hear but might be less impactful if they cannot be present to tell them.

We would encourage this consideration be given not only during the pandemic, but that it be operationalized on an ongoing basis so that all Ohioans can have a meaningful opportunity to be heard and be engaged.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on HB 55. Please contact me if you have any questions.