



Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

TESTIMONY BEFORE
OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

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PRESENTED BY
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<https://www.areaagingsolutions.org/>

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee: I introduce myself as Dr. E. Douglas Beach, Chief Executive Officer of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, and extend my grateful appreciation for this opportunity today to testify with regard to the state budget bill.

Being the largest of Ohio's 12 area agencies on aging, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA), is designated by the State of Ohio to serve older adults 60 years and over in its five county service region, i.e., Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain and Medina Counties. Our agency's mission is to provide choices for people to live independently in the place they want to call home. As President of the state association, I speak today on behalf of all 12 Ohio Area Agencies on Aging and the people they serve.

For years, the Area Agencies on Aging – collectively with respective provider networks – have performed and operated at their optimal best with respective available resources. And, we have accomplished “a lot with a little,” saving the state an estimated \$12 billion in more than 20 years of providing home and community-based care.

In representing these area agencies, I have come before the General Assembly with **one goal** in mind – advocating for increased resources for Ohio's home and community-based system for older adults, both in the Medicaid program and non -Medicaid program. The assurance of **adequate resources**, dedicated to the full spectrum of supports that will enable aging Ohioans to live healthy, engaged and secure lives **must be guaranteed**. *Home is where older Ohioans want to be, now more than ever.* Most unfortunately, in this current moment, the wait list for

personal care services has increased to almost 3,000 individuals, and countless more are on waiting lists for local services or stand in need. **Home is hastily moving out of reach!**

We 12 agencies wholly appreciate the Senate's attention to and recognition of Ohio's under-funded Medicaid home and community-based waiver services system and the serious nature of the current workforce shortage. For Medicaid HCBS waiver provider rates, the Senate's inclusion of a 4% provider rate increase in state fiscal year 2022 and an additional 2% increase for state fiscal year 2023 is a significant step in the right direction.

Home and community-based services are the lower cost option, and to reiterate, home is where Ohioans want to stay as grow older. The historic underfunding of HCBS and provider rates requires a greater investment to keep pace with an aging population compounded by ever-increasing costs to provide support services. To ensure we have the capacity to make home and community-based services universally accessible and attainable, rates need to be aligned with similar Medicaid services in other programs, along with competitive wages in private sector jobs.

It cannot be overemphasized: we have a workforce shortage. This service industry cannot find aides for the demand that currently exists. As our wait lists for services continues to escalate, individuals enrolled in waiver programs are going without personal care services. **At the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, we had 587 people waiting for personal care in the Medicaid waiver programs, including PASSPORT, MyCare, and Ohio Home Care for April 2021.** When over 90% of people want to age in place in their homes and the cost is 1/6th of the cost of institutional care, comprehensive efforts must be implemented to making this system work.

In closing, and on behalf of these 12 Area Agencies on Aging, thank you for the overall 6% Medicaid HCBS provider rate increase; this is an important investment in the Medicaid home and community-based waiver system. Older Ohioans and adults with disabilities *deserve to enjoy, thrive and age gracefully* in their own homes and in the communities they helped build and sustain. This is a promising start toward a future where all components of Ohio's long-term care systems are equitably resourced (at home, in assisted living, in nursing facilities) so that home is a genuine option for Ohio's citizens.

Once more, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.