



Testimony to the Ohio Committee
Sylvia Pla-Raith, Chair, Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services
May 4, 2021

Chair Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.B. 110 as an interested party. In particular, we are addressing the state's Adult Protective Services program that is part of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' budget (ALI 600-534). My name is Sylvia Pla-Raith and I am the Chair of the Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services. I also serve as the Director of the Ohio Attorney General's Elder Justice Unit and am the past Chief of Adult Protective Services in Cuyahoga County.

The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services (OCAPS) is a statewide coalition whose purpose is to enhance the provision of services by collaboration, education, and advocacy on behalf of older people who may be at risk or are survivors of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Members include county adult protective services workers, state and nonprofit agencies and community members.

We request the Senate keep the House-added funding increase of \$1.5 million per SFY to support the state's core adult protective services. In addition, we ask the Senate to consider providing much-needed additional funding of \$4.28 million to bolster the total appropriation to \$10 million per SFY. This increased investment in adult protective services would: enable local communities to make more connections, strengthen existing connections and find better ways to respond quickly to elder abuse and neglect. Each county should be provided with at least **\$65,000 per year** and additional resources so each county has the resources to employ at least one full-time equivalent and enable APS workers to create a feasible safety case plan for abused older adults to alleviate the risk to his or her safety and security. We believe that an additional investment of \$4.28 million per year in addition to the House-added increase of \$1.5 million in H.B. 110 is necessary to accomplish these goals.

Between SFY 2018 through SFY 2020 we saw an increase from 20,000 reports of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation statewide, to nearly 34,000, a 68.9% increase. Still, research says that an estimated 170,000 or more cases of elder abuse and neglect occur in Ohio each year, with only a fraction reported to adult protective services.

We appreciate the modest increase of \$1.49 million this chamber enacted in the last state budget. This enabled each county APS program to receive an increase to \$48,000 per year to support their programs from the \$31,000 per year previously. But it is not enough to keep Ohioans safe. As it stands currently, there is no other dedicated source of funding for adult protective services in Ohio other than this state line item in the job and family services budget. While some communities are able to leverage local dollars to further support the system, it puts undue pressure on the

community to deal with competing important priorities, and results in a distinct disparity in capacity between those counties with the means to further subsidize the system compared to those who cannot.

We believe in a just society that recognizes that all people are equal. No matter how old we are, we are entitled to be treated as full members of our communities. Adult protective services is among the supports we rely on to be there for us as we age. This support has been bolstered with recent changes to the law that have improved understanding of elder abuse, included more mandatory reporters, fortified the state and local systems, connected interrelated supports, and modestly increased resources to enable local systems to do more.

The transformation of APS has resulted in a system that is intended to be more responsive to our communities and to be better able to respond quickly to elder abuse and neglect. One example is that each county is statutorily required to establish its own interdisciplinary team (I-Team) to bring together APS, law enforcement, the courts, and social services, at a minimum, to engage in case reviews and identify gaps and resources. I-Teams are an incredibly useful tool to help counties with educating all agencies that are dealing with elder abuse or its effects and to leverage resources and expertise, but it takes time to develop relationships and establish the commitment among agencies to attend meetings and share resources. The lack of core funding for APS has made it difficult for some counties to implement these groups as intended.

The consequences of not having a robust adult protective services system in place to ensure access to justice for us all as we age is significant. Financial losses (annually estimated as \$36.5 billion per year nationally) can bankrupt individuals and even other family members, causing them to turn to publicly funded programs to provide for their basic needs. In fact, one in ten financial abuse victims will turn to Medicaid as a direct result of their own monies being stolen from them. Victims of elder abuse and neglect are four times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home and three times more likely to be admitted to a hospital.

Throughout Ohio, there are many counties that do not have even one full-time equivalent dedicated to APS.

Often, the responsibility for providing adult protective services for those who are 60 and older has been passed off to already strained child protective services workers. While there are some similarities between these two protective programs, there are significant differences. This is unfair to both the staff and to all of us who only want to live healthy, engaged and secure lives and access the supports we need in our homes and communities.

We are pleased the Consolidated Appropriations Act provided the first ever federal funding of APS - \$3M in Ohio of one-time funds to be released in SFY21 that must be spent by around this time next year. The need for emergency services such as housing facing our vulnerable older adults is vast and has been further exacerbated by the social isolation and financial scams targeting older adults that have become even more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these one-time funds cannot be used to hire staff, and Ohio's adult protective services needs more social workers to do prompt investigations and develop safety plans to connect older adults to these services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I may be contacted at Sylvia.Pla-Raith@OhioAttorneyGeneral.Gov or 614.420.1218 to answer any questions you may have.



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