

## TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO HOUSE FINANCE HHS SUBCOMMITTEE

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March 2, 2023

*(Intro)*

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, I am Justin Moor, Interim CEO of the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on HB 33.

We at the Area Office on Aging have the honor of serving 40,000 northwest Ohioans a year living in Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Sandusky, Williams, and Wood counties.

I was grateful to be welcomed into the home of one of these older northwest Ohioans in Representative Hoops' District yesterday. She lives in an independent affordable senior housing complex that our Agency's CEO Mrs. Billie Johnson had built in Defiance about 35 years ago. In addition to welcoming me into her home, Ms. Lindhorst gave me permission to share her story with you. She had two strokes which has negatively affected her mobility. Her doctor says she has to wear a brace on her leg that cannot be worn in the shower. Her doctor told her that she needs to have a home health aide to help her get in and get out of the shower. She has been on the State's Medicaid-funded PASSPORT In-Home Care Program. Ms. Lindhorst pays what she can afford with her limited income toward this program, which amounts to \$263/month. Through this program, she has been provided with home-delivered meals and a medical alert emergency response system button she can push if she falls and can't get back up. She is grateful for the help she receives and at the same time she is painfully aware that she needs more help.

What Ms. Lindhorst really wants and needs and what the PASSPORT Program promises to provide is a home health aide. For over the last 13 months, the State's PASSPORT Program has not delivered on this promise. Since the PASSPORT Program's reimbursement rate for home care is so low with the Ohio median hourly wage for home care workers being 13% below the national average at \$12.61/hour, no home health aide can be found to help Ms. Lindhorst a bath. Over the last year, she often goes two weeks without a bath. During this time, she will maneuver herself over to the sink and give herself what she calls "a little bird bath." Her 18-year-old granddaughter lives in a different town, is in high school as well as taking college classes and working a job, she does what she can to help her grandmother, but going to give her grandma a bath once about every two weeks out of the goodness of her heart is the best she do.

There are a lucky few in her apartment complex who after waiting for a long time to get a home health aide through the PASSPORT Program were able to get one for a few hours. Ms. Lindhorst will try to catch this home health aide when she is in the building and beg her for a bath. But with the little amount she gets paid through PASSPORT and her company struggling to be able to stay afloat with the low PASSPORT rate, the hard answer this home health aide has to deliver to Ms. Lindhorst is, "I'm sorry, but my home health agency told me I cannot." In order for this home health aide and her home health agency to say "yes" to Ms. Lindhorst, the home health aide needs to get paid the \$20/hour home health aides are getting paid to help other groups of Ohioans through other home care programs.

This home health aide is put in a position of having to choose between doing the honest and admirable work of caring for an aging fellow Ohioan and being able to afford to care for her own family budget. Speaking of budgets, over the last year, 8 of the PASSPORT-funded home health agencies in northwest Ohio had to go out of business due to the budget problems the low reimbursement rate caused. Whether it's a family budget, the budget of a business, or the budget of our great State of Ohio, budgets are all the same, there's unlimited wants and only a limited amount of money available. Therefore, a budget is a reflection of our priorities. My fellow Ohioans, with all do respect, when it comes to prioritizing the home care needs of our older Ohioans, we can do better, and we must do better.

In her February 23rd testimony to this Subcommittee, Ohio Department of Aging Director Ursel McElroy laid out a plan to address this issue of increasing the PASSPORT home care rate as well as investing \$40 million in one-time American Rescue Plan Act funding to county commissioners in the form of Healthy Aging Grants. We have a great relationship with our county commissioners, many of whom sit on our Board of Directors, and we are confident that these Healthy Aging Grants will go a long way to keeping older Ohioans healthy so they are prevented from ever having to go on Medicaid-funded home care programs.

In her testimony, Director McElroy said, "Our budget request is sound. It is reflective of our moral imperative to see that all Ohioans have the tools and the understanding they need to live up to their God-given potential." Tomorrow, when your older constituents are asked the question if they feel like they have all the tools they need to live up to their God-given potential, remember that how they respond will be determined by how you vote.

On behalf of Ms. Lindhorst, I thank you for your service to our great State and for focusing your service on making a better tomorrow for Ms. Lindhorst and the thousands of older Ohioans like her who are in need of a little help.