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**Written Testimony on House Bill 33**  
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
March 23, 2023  
Kalitha Williams, Outreach & Advocacy Manager

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and distinguished members of the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Kalitha Williams, and I serve as Outreach & Advocacy Manager for AARPOhio and am responsible for leading the state office's public policy agenda. As you are aware, AARP, with 1.5 million members in Ohio, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps empower people to choose how they live as they age, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families, such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

In an earlier hearing before this subcommittee, we offered proponent testimony the Ohio Department of Aging budget proposal for Healthy Aging Grants. **We are here today to express our support for the additional funding requested by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to support Adult Protective Services and to affirm the critical charge of the Ohio Governor's Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Taskforce.**

For far too long, local communities have not had the resources they need to investigate suspected abuse of older Ohioans. The State Legislature has, recently, passed important laws to protect older Ohioans from telecommunications fraud and created penalties for mandatory reporters that fail to report evidence of elder abuse. Increasing funding for adult protective services an additional \$4 million for each fiscal year, ensures there are resources in place to enforce important policy safeguards. Combining strong laws with robust funding demonstrates our state's commitment to protect Ohio's growing population of older adults.

AARP has been a strong voice for nursing home residents and their families highlighting the need for transparency and accountability of the industry. With 24% of COVID-19 deaths in Ohio from nursing homes residents and staff, the pandemic demonstrated the critical need for transparency and accountability of industry.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, alone, nursing homes were awarded hundreds of millions of dollars of state funding with few guardrails to ensure the additional resources would, directly, improve patient care. We applaud Governor DeWine's leadership in

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<sup>1</sup> AARP Nursing Home COVID-19 Dashboard Fact Sheets - <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/issues/caregiving/info-2020/nursing-home-covid-states.html>



creating and implementing the Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Taskforce, of which we are a member. Through the leadership of the Ohio Department of Aging, the taskforce has been driving an aggressive schedule to hear from Ohioans throughout the state to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences to improve our state's nursing homes. A recent survey of Ohioans 45 and over, found that 74% of the respondents want improvements to Ohio's long-term care services.<sup>2</sup> We implore this committee and the entire Legislature to not finalize any decisions on the future of nursing homes until Ohioans have had the opportunity to engage on this important issue and the work of the taskforce is complete and shared with policymakers and the public.

Much has been shared about the need to increase wages for direct care employees. While, we agree this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed, we contend it is only one part of building an adequate, stable, and well-trained long-term care direct care workforce. Ohio must address and improve three aspects of direct care work, simultaneously. These areas are compensation (i.e., wages and benefits), education and training, and job satisfaction. Only addressing one or two of these three aspects without the others will not produce the strong and lasting results we need to solve the growing shortage of direct care workers. Ohio's direct care workers provide important support to our state's most vulnerable citizens. They deserve an integrated approach that includes appropriate compensation and good jobs, including livable wages, health insurance, paid leave, consistent assignment, full-time hours (where desired), flexible and portable training, advancement opportunities, and job improvements that provide opportunities to be valued as a respected member of the care team, including supportive supervisions and real input into care planning, management decisions, and quality improvement.

If our state is to fulfill its bold vision that "Ohio is the best place to age in the nation," then we must ensure robust funding to protect older Ohioans from abuse and ensure any nursing home reforms include the voices of all Ohio's stakeholders. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 33.

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<sup>2</sup> AARP Research Vital Voices - <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00351.250>