

December 7, 2022

Governor Mike DeWine
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Supporting Older Ohioans and Ohioans with Disabilities in the Next State Budget

Dear Governor DeWine:

As our population grows older, we encounter new opportunities for our communities and our state. We all want to have the choice to age in our homes and communities. We want to remain engaged and connected. We want to be able to share our experiences and insights with our families, our neighbors, and our community.

Now is the time to take bold action to improve how our state supports us all as we age. With your support, we can make Ohio the best state in the nation in which to age!

Home and community-based Medicaid waiver programs are cost-effective options for older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities to live healthy, engaged, secure lives in their homes and communities. However, providers continue to experience barriers to participation in these programs. Low reimbursement rates combine with staffing shortages to make the business model unsustainable.

Older Ohioans are waiting from **months to two years** for supportive personal care services so they can live independently in their communities.

- As of October 2022, **at least 2,000 older Ohioans** eligible and enrolled in PASSPORT Medicaid waiver services across the state are not able to receive personal care services.
- **An estimated 5,000 people statewide** enrolled in all Area Agency on Aging-administered programs for home care are going without personal care services.

Home care providers report that they are unable to recruit or retain direct care workers because low Medicaid reimbursement rates limit their ability to pay competitive wages. Providers can typically only offer **\$10-12 an hour** for personal care services for PASSPORT-eligible older Ohioans.

- Low wages and lack of affordable benefits are the principal drivers behind the direct care workforce shortage.
- Among settings that employ direct care workers, including personal care aides, direct service professionals, home health aides and nursing facility state-tested nurse aides, PASSPORT and the Ohio Homecare Waiver offer the lowest pay for personal care services, creating an imbalance between care settings' ability to recruit and retain caregiving professionals. As a result, skilled direct care workers opt for higher pay and better working conditions which creates an imbalance in the system.

- Home care providers continue to drop out of the PASSPORT program because reimbursement is inadequate to cover the cost of care; instead, they limit their business to Medicare skilled home health, private pay or other payors with higher reimbursement rates.
- Direct care work is highly skilled work that has a health-promoting impact on people's lives, enabling them to live independently in their private home. Persistently low pay undervalues the physical demands of the work, the significant social and emotional aspects of its delivery, and the extent to which direct care workers are now assisting individuals in managing complex health conditions. This is true regardless of setting or population.

The undersigned organizations support all efforts to make home and community-based services sustainable so that all Ohioans have the option to receive services at home now and in the future.

We are grateful for efforts made by the Governor's staff and Cabinet Directors with the Departments of Aging and Medicaid for their work in gathering input from stakeholders and working towards long term policy solutions. We appreciated the opportunity to share our respective organizations' priorities with the Departments of Aging and Medicaid and are eager to work with your Administration to work through the details of these proposals.

We collectively ask that you include in the Executive Budget an increase in Medicaid PASSPORT and Ohio Home Care personal care reimbursement by at least 50% so that providers can pay approach a **competitive wage of \$20/hour** to direct care workers and to allow providers to meet the cost of providing services. There should be parity across Ohio's long-term services and supports system (with Medicaid waivers, waivers for developmental disabilities, nursing facilities, etc.) so that older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities can have a meaningful choice of where to call home.

We need parity across Ohio's long-term services and support system and the populations it serves to ensure that everyone can live and age with dignity, autonomy and choice in their homes and communities.

We stand ready to work with you and your Administration to meet this challenge. Please reach out to Beth Kowalczyk, kowalczyk@ohioaging.org, 614-754-7028 if you have any questions or would like to speak with us further.

Sincerely,

Coalition of Age-Friendly Communities of Ohio

LeadingAge Ohio

Ohio Adult Day Healthcare Association

Ohio Assisted Living Association

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Ohio Association of Senior Centers

Ohio Coalition of Adult Protective Services

Ohio Council for Home Care and Hospice

Ohio Health Care Association

Cc: Ursel McElroy, Director, Department of Aging
Maureen Corcoran, Director, Department of Medicaid
Scott Partika, Governor's Office