



TESTIMONY BEFORE
OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE

Doug McGarry, Executive Director
Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2
May 10, 2023



Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, I am Doug McGarry, Executive Director with the Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the issues specific to older adults in our Agency.

The Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2 serves nine counties in Ohio's west central region, including Champaign, Clark, Darke, Greene, Logan, Miami, Montgomery, Preble and Shelby counties. The west central region of Ohio serves both rural and urban communities. The area is home to 288,784 older adults over the age of 60, accounting for almost 25% of the total population of the nine counties. Our Area Agency on Aging serves over 6000 older adults on a daily basis with managing their home and community based services. These home and community based services include providing answers to questions on aging services, community resources, caring for a loved one, to a home delivered meal or personal care assistance.

In the Ohio Department of Aging's FY 2024 and 2025 executive budget request, Director McElroy testified before this committee for \$40 million in Healthy Aging Grants, wage increases for frontline workers from \$17 per hour up to \$20 per hour, increases in Assisted Living services of 48%, modernization of technology including making provider enrollment more efficient, and finally expanding The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE). We support all of these recommendations and are thankful the House of Representatives included them all in Substitute House Bill 33. Specifically, the Substitute bill calls for a wage increase from \$16 to \$17 in FY24 and \$17 to \$18 in FY 25. The Substitute bill also calls for the continued funding of Senior Community services. We advocate all of these items remain included in the Senate version.

My focus today is to request consideration for an even higher wage of \$20 per hour to address equal access to home and community based services and an equitable wage across waivers. Currently we have over 750 consumers in our nine county region waiting on a home care aide. These consumers have been determined eligible for assistance, many enrolled in our programs, yet cannot find a personal care aide to even provide a bath one time a week. Most, if not all of these older adults are waiting several months, if not years for an aide. One individual who lives in New Lebanon has been trying to obtain an aide for almost 2 years. Before the workforce shortages, her services were inconsistent and there was high turnover as providers stated it was very challenging to find an aide agreeable to travel to this location. This in addition to staffing shortages compound her wait time to at least 5x longer than average pre-pandemic. We are fortunate we can provide other supplemental services such as a home delivered meal for those who cannot cook or minor home repairs or modifications to assist in completing personal care tasks as independently as possible.

Before the pandemic, our Agency embarked on evaluating the challenges our providers were facing as a result of little to no rate increases for years with the assistance of a DelMar Encore Fellowship. We found our provider network, making up over 250 home and community based provider agencies, wanted to provide quality care, but low reimbursement rates were the primary reason they couldn't. We found our provider network:

- Lost employees at application due to the inability to provide paid training or comparable industry wages.
- Employees who did the work had a passion to be in a helping profession, but were looking elsewhere for benefits such as healthcare, paid leave time, or even mileage reimbursement.
- In 2023, 7 currently contracted personal care providers closed their doors due to the inability to maintain operations due to the workforce shortages they face.

Since this evaluation, we have held roundtable discussions in our community and provided presentations to continue to advocate for equitable, increased wages across Medicaid waivers. Our region has deployed support to our provider network to assist in paying and linking new hires to training options. We have also increased our Levy services to include paying family caregivers and providing self-directed care. We have been able to link almost 100 consumers who were waiting for a personal care aide to someone they selected to provide their care. Over half of these caregivers were already providing the necessary care to keep their loved one at home, unpaid, but now have the ability to be paid for this service, enabling relief for both the consumer and caregiver from the challenges of waiting for an aide. More than half of these paid caregivers are family members.

We urge you to continue to ensure equal access to home care for older adults and people with disabilities by supporting the current recommendation in Substitute House Bill 33, but recognize an increased wage to \$20 hour for the direct care workers and an increase of at least 50% to the Medicaid reimbursement will truly provide the support that is needed for the sustainability and viability of long term care services and supports.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.