



Your Aging and Disability Resource Network

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Thursday, May 4, 2023

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the committee, my name is Grant Ames, and I serve as the Government and Community Relations Manager for the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, PSA 6. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Substitute Bill 33. As Ohio's population continues to age, programs focused on supporting older and disabled adults must receive the necessary funding to ensure every Ohioan can age with dignity, autonomy, and respect.

For over 40 years, the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging (COAAA) has continued to plan, fund, and deliver services that help older adults and individuals with disabilities remain safe and independent in their homes. With the assistance of area providers, COAAA arranges and coordinates services to help individuals with daily living, such as homemaking, transportation, home-delivered meals, and personal care. In addition, COAAA offers education and resources to caregivers, professionals, and the public and advocates for programs and policies that benefit older adults and individuals with disabilities. COAAA manages services for over 13,000 people and funds services for another 20,000 older adults across eight counties Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union.

In 2022, Area Agencies on Aging across Ohio reported that nearly 2,000 eligible and enrolled individuals are waiting for PASSPORT services due to a lack of direct care workers. This waiting list has had a significant impact on the consumers, family caregivers, and communities we serve. While an overwhelming number (95%) of older adults in Central Ohio wish to age at home, many have been forced to enter institutional care because they lack the necessary support. While individuals eligible for these programs require a nursing home level of care, connecting them with home and community-based services (HCBS) is more cost-effective and has proven to support better participant outcomes.

The workforce crisis is even more pronounced in rural areas, where some consumers have waited up to 6 months for a personal care aid. Lacking professional support, family caregivers report leaving the workforce to care for their loved ones. They've expressed feelings of stress and burnout. Without respite, many caregivers will see their health decline.

Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging • Grant Ames, Government & Community Relations Manager

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On behalf of the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, I would like to express our appreciation for Governor DeWine and Director McElroy's proposed investments into Ohio's aging network. Especially the inclusion of additional resources to support the expansion of Senior Community Services and Alzheimer's and Dementia Care. We look forward to partnering closely with our County Commissioners to effectively invest the proposed Healthy Aging grants to build resiliency across the Central Ohio region. While we applaud these sizable investments proposed in the Governor's budget, we believe the amendments included in HB33 by the Ohio House will have an even greater impact on our industry and Ohio's direct care workforce.

The House's investment in workers will go a long way in recruiting and retaining a direct care workforce capable of supporting the growing demand for services. While we at COAAA joined organizations across Ohio's aging and disability network in advocating for a \$20/hour wage for direct care workers, the proposed increases included in HB33 to \$17/hour in 2024 and \$18/hour in 2025 are a great start to bolster our efforts to provide vital HCBS.

We urge members of the Ohio Senate to support the increased investments and innovative solutions included in House Substitute Bill 33 to address the growing workforce crisis. Funding parity between nursing homes, home and community-based services, and other Medicaid programs is imperative to ensure a robust aging infrastructure and services for the entire continuum of care.

Thank you for taking the time to review our testimony and for your consideration of our requests. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at (614) 645-1508 or garnes@coaaa.org. With your support, we can expand our capacity to provide in-home care to older adults across Central Ohio for years to come.

Sincerely,

Grant Ames

Grant Ames
Government & Community Relations Manager, COAAA

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