

# TESTIMONY BEFORE OHIO SENATE MEDICAID COMMITTEE

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Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging  
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Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the committee, I am Duana Patton, CEO with the Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Substitute Bill 33.

The Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc. is one of the 12 Area Agencies in Ohio serving a 9-county region that includes Ashland, Crawford, Huron, Knox, Marion, Morrow, Richland, Seneca, and Wyandot Counties. The region is predominantly rural with a growing 60+ population.

The Governor's 2024-2025 executive budget proposes historic increased investments that are vital to supporting us as we age in our homes and communities.

These include increased rates for the assisted living waiver, adult day services and home-delivered meals; increased funding for PASSPORT Administrative Agencies; increases in funding for the Senior Community Services program; new Healthy Aging grants; an increase to the Alzheimer's and Dementia Respite line item; technology modernization; an increase for Adult Protective Services, and an Aging Economy Report.

We are also very appreciative of the House amendment that would increase rates to support wages for personal care workers (the direct care workforce) at \$17/hour in 2024 and \$18/hour in 2025. Our request is for a provider rate that will enable providers to pay at least \$20/hour. We need a competitive wage, and to recognize that direct care work is valuable work that should be recognized for its impact on people's lives.

To live healthy, engaged, and secure lives as we age in our homes and communities, we must ensure adequate resources are dedicated to the full spectrum of supports, especially home and community-based services, which includes home care.

Home care, specifically personal care services, provides help with basic activities of daily living. These activities of daily living include bathing or showering, getting out of bed in the morning and in bed at night, dressing, toileting and personal hygiene. With help with these things, people have the option to live at home with dignity and independence.

Our agency has witnessed the impact of low wages for the direct care workforce, low rates paid to our home health providers and high and growing needs of individuals. Currently, there are approximately 450 individuals enrolled in our programs who are waiting for personal care or

homemaker services. The wait to secure in home services is not short with an average wait time of 107 days or 15 weeks. Without services individuals are left vulnerable and sometimes are forced to find care in a nursing home. Since 2020, our agency has lost just over 10% of our home health providers, many claiming low reimbursement or lack of workforce the reasons for closing their business or cancelling their contract.

Within our network of Area Agencies on Aging, we are currently facing a workforce shortage that has resulted in at least 4500 people statewide enrolled in Area Agency on Aging programs waiting for home care services. In the Medicaid HCBS PASSPORT waiver for older adults, more than 2000 individuals are waiting for personal care services.

Different rates and requirements for similar work in Medicaid programs result in a competition for a small number of workers and an imbalance in the system.

Over the past several months, the Area Agencies on Aging have organized home care roundtables across the state to give a voice to the providers, caregivers, direct care workers and individuals we serve.

The number one theme that emerged from the roundtable was low reimbursement rates resulting in an inability to pay a competitive wage to recruit workers.

Providers shared that they have tried numerous retention and recruitment strategies with little success; that they lose potential caregivers to other providers, programs and industries that pay much more; that the reimbursement rate is insufficient to cover the cost to provide service, and that workers are facing a benefits cliff where small wage increases will mean they lose critical work supports.

Therefore, our Association, as well as a coalition of Aging Organizations, have requested an increase in rates. We have heard from providers that to recruit and sustain this workforce, we need to increase wages for personal care workers in Aging and Medicaid waivers to \$20/hour. We also need parity across populations and programs so that older Ohioans and Ohioans with disabilities can have a meaningful choice of where to call home.

