

**TESTIMONY BEFORE  
OHIO SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
May 25, 2023

DR. E. DOUGLAS BEACH, CEO  
WESTERN RESERVE AREA AGENCY ON AGING (WRAAA)

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Finance Committee, I am Dr. E. Douglas Beach, Chief Executive Officer of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute HB 33, Ohio's proposed 2024-2025 Operating Budget.

Being the largest of Ohio's area agencies on aging, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging is designated by the State of Ohio to serve older adults 60 years and over in its five-county service region that includes Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina Counties. Our agency's mission is to provide choices for people to live independently in the place they want to call home. As immediate Past-President of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, I am here today on behalf of all 12 Area Agencies that together serve Ohio's 88 counties.

Our top budget priority is to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates to \$20/hour for personal care services. It cannot be overemphasized that we have a workforce shortage. This service industry cannot find home health aides to meet the demand that currently exists. As of April 2023, the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging has 632 people waiting for personal care services in the Medicaid waiver programs, including PASSPORT, MyCare, and Ohio Home Care. As our wait lists for services continue to escalate, individuals enrolled in waiver programs are going without personal care services, but will continue to receive other services such as home-delivered meals, emergency response systems, and case management.

For example, WRAAA's PASSPORT client, Ms. G., is 81 years of age and lives alone in her own home. Ms. G is able to make her needs known but requires assistance with her daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, preparing meals, transferring from bed to chair, and all of her homemaking tasks. Over 40 personal care providers were contacted, but help is not available due to her county's limited pool of providers. The family is very involved in the care of their mother, but often miss work to care for her. Recently, one daughter-in-law, due to her own

failing physical health, had to stop assisting Ms. G. In the last two months, the family found “friends” in the community who were willing to become certified as self-directed attendants, however, their assistance is sporadic. This is not an uncommon case. Working families often are the backup to provide the needed care for their loved ones at home. In other situations, some clients who are in nursing homes stay there longer because they do not have personal care services to return home. If they normally had an aide at home, their aide may have been reassigned to another case while the individual was in the nursing home. Hence, these clients may convert to long-term care when they could otherwise return to the community.

We support and appreciate the House’s budget version that significantly increases provider reimbursement rates to \$17/hour in SFY 2024 and \$18/hour in SFY 2025. However, we continue to advocate for a \$20/hour wage needed to make home care jobs for older adults competitive with similar jobs in the long-term care continuum. Among the Medicaid programs, PASSPORT personal care is the lowest paid while doing similar work. This results in competition for a small number of workers and creates an imbalance within the system. It is critical to address this imbalance and bring parity to Medicaid programs. These compassionate workers need to earn a livable wage to care for our most vulnerable citizens. A home health agency stated that a client described their aide as “an angel here on earth.”

I also want to bring to your attention the Senior Community Services line item in the Ohio Department of Aging’s budget. In the executive budget, this line item represents the minimum needed to draw down the full \$51 million available in ARPA funding. However, the passed House bill reduced the Senior Community Services line item by \$1.2 million in FY2024 and by \$1.5 million in FY2025. We urge you to restore the Senior Community Services line item to the Governor’s introduced level of over \$13 million each fiscal year to draw down ARPA funds.

In summary, we appreciate this Committee’s attention to and recognition of Ohio’s under-funded Medicaid home and community-based waiver services. We urge you to also restore the Senior Community Services line item to the levels proposed in the Executive Budget to draw down federal ARPA funds.

Thank you on behalf of those we serve.