



**Area Agency on Aging - Region 9, Inc.**  
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*Serving Ohio's Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey,  
Harrison, Holmes, Jefferson, Muskingum, and Tuscarawas  
counties for over 45 years*

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## Testimony Before Ohio House Children & Human Services Committee

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Area Agency on Aging Region 9, Inc  
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Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, I am honored to stand before you today. My name is Jud Love, Chief Executive Officer of the Area Agency on Aging Region 9 (AAA9).

While located in Cambridge, I am proud to represent 9 counties in eastern Ohio comprising of Tuscarawas, Muskingum, Guernsey, Coshocton, Belmont, Jefferson, Carroll, Holmes, and Harrison. AAA9 is but one of the 12 AAAs across the state with extensive experience administering case management for the PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and Ohio Home Care waiver programs. We are also proud to administer Older Americans Act and Senior Community Services programs across our region.

While AAA9 is part of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, we are each unique as our constituencies are as vast and diverse as every member of this committee's. Just like all of you we have been honored and tasked with ensuring we are vocal proponents and supporters of the needs of those in our regions. Our goal is to work collaboratively as a network with the Ohio Department of Aging with whom we are closely aligned in our mission to not only make Ohio the best place to age in the nation, but also partner with people, communities, and organizations to help older adults live independently and enjoy the highest quality of life possible.

### **Budget Priorities**

I echo Beth Kowalczyk, O4A CEO's, prior sentiments in appreciation for the support for the aging network contained in the Governor's proposed budget.

**Provider Rates:** The increased reimbursement in the last biennial budget allowed providers to increase wages and benefits for the direct care workers they employ. I have seen firsthand the positive impact the increased rates have had on the retention of staff for providers while also ensuring consumers receive the services they need. Between PASSPORT and Assisted Living Waiver AAA9's case managers partner with more than 2,800 consumers who receive over \$60 million in services annually. These funds are paid to providers who in turn pay direct service workers who spend the funds in the communities in which we serve. It is critical these rates are not only sustained but the regular review of these rates in the future will ensure all Ohioans can

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continue to choose where they live and how they live as they age. I would encourage the state to pursue methods in which these rates are regularly reviewed with the intent of ensuring access to services for all Ohioans.

**Housing:** AAA9 was pleased to see the Governor's budget supported investments in housing development in rural counties such as the ones found within the AAA9 region. Ensuring the existing homes of older adults are maintained in a manner that allows them to remain in a safe, secure home provides a quality of life to which all older Ohioans are entitled. I would encourage the General Assembly to please consider increasing investment in the Ohio Housing Trust Fund (OHTF) to support affordable housing and home modification and repairs. I can personally attest to the fact that this investment is having an impact in my region. AAA9 currently utilizes OHTF funds coupled with Senior Community Services funds to invest over \$300,000 annually in our community for the purpose of ensuring consumers can remain in their homes allowing them to feel valued and respected. At an average cost of \$13,000 per job AAA9 can complete roughly 23 jobs annually in our region. I can also attest to the fact that AAA9 currently has a waitlist for these services.

**Healthy Aging-> Senior Community Services Program:** The 12 Area Agencies on Aging strategically situated across the state are uniquely connected with the communities they serve. The impact of the Healthy Aging Grants from the last biennium budget cannot be denied. AAA9 was able to partner with and participate in the administration of the Healthy Aging grants in 2 of our 9 counties. Utilizing these funds, we were able to create housing opportunities in 2 of our counties where we could strategically partner Healthy Aging with other housing funds to extend the impact. We were also able to connect older adults with digital literacy opportunities in our rural counties. Unfortunately, we did have 1 county who chose to return the funds rather than seize upon the opportunity. AAA9 would request the state continue to make older adults a priority and invest an additional \$10 million per fiscal year in the state's budget in the Senior Community Services Program. This investment would allow AAAs the flexibility to provide services and programs to persons earlier that would not only meet the needs of home delivered meals and transportation but would also allow us to engage older adults in housing projects allowing them to age in place.

As the newest AAA CEO, I can say I am excited for the opportunity to continue the conversation regarding these priorities while pursuing the goal of making Ohio the best place to age in the nation.