

Testimony – House Bill 96

Ohio Senate Health Committee

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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

The Area Office on Aging helps individuals age 60 and older, their family caregivers, and younger persons with disabilities live better and longer lives. Our mission is rooted in promoting dignity, independence, and quality of life for older Ohioans—values we believe are shared by the members of this committee.

Senior Community Services

A key way the State of Ohio supports older adults is through the **Senior Community Services line item**, which helps provide critical services like home-delivered meals, congregate meals at senior centers, transportation to medical appointments, and respite support for family caregivers.

Unfortunately, over the past two decades, **funding for the Senior Community Services line item has been cut by 36%**, even as the cost of providing these services has nearly **doubled due to inflation**. Compounding this strain is the demographic shift: **the number of older adults in northwest Ohio has grown by 43%** during that same time period.

We respectfully urge the Senate to increase the Senior Community Services line item in House Bill 96 by \$1M each FY, to ensure that older Ohioans can continue to age with dignity in their own homes and communities. Without this increase, service providers across the state will be forced to reduce or eliminate essential programs, leaving some of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens without the support they need to maintain their health, safety, and independence.

Supporting Older Adults Through Creative Engagement

Socialization plays a crucial role in helping older adults live healthier and longer lives. A recent study found that loneliness has a negative impact on health equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. To combat this, the Area Office on Aging has partnered with the **Toledo Museum of Art** and senior centers in Lucas and Wood counties to offer creative, socially engaging art classes. These include glassblowing, painting, jewelry-making, and more.

These classes are not only a powerful tool for social connection, but also provide respite care to full-time caregivers. Respite care is essential for the health and well-being of full-time caregivers, many of whom are family members providing around-the-clock support to aging loved ones. Without regular breaks, caregivers are at high risk of burnout, depression, and physical health problems, which can compromise the quality of care they provide. Respite care offers temporary relief, allowing caregivers time to rest, attend to their own medical needs, or simply recharge, ultimately helping them sustain their caregiving role over the long term. Supporting respite care services is not just an investment in the care recipient, but also in the stability and resilience of the entire caregiving system.

To further this initiative, we are requesting **\$500,000 in funding** from the State to sustain and expand the program, which is expected to benefit approximately **4,500 older Ohioans** over the biennium. Additionally, the program includes **dementia-friendly tours** at the Toledo Museum of Art led by trained docents. These tours are coordinated with **MemoryLane Care Services**, which provides adult day services, allowing family caregivers a much-needed temporary break.

Conclusion

We ask this Committee to invest in what works: essential services that help older Ohioans live independently, and innovative programs that support their mental and emotional well-being. Increasing funding for the **Senior Community Services line item** in HB 96 and supporting community-based programs like our art initiative will yield long-term health benefits for thousands of Ohioans.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Ohio's older adults. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.