



Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

June 24, 2024

Speaker Jason Stephens
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215
Re: HB 344

Speaker Stephens,

The Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a) writes to express our opposition to House Bill 344, which would enact significant and detrimental changes to the tax levy process in our state. As written, this bill will negatively impact the ability of Area Agencies on Aging to serve older adults in our communities effectively.

By providing options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services, programming, and living arrangements that suit them best, Area Agencies on Aging make it possible for older adults to thrive in their homes and communities.

We all want to have the choice to age in our homes and communities. We want to remain engaged and connected. We want to be able to share our experiences and insights with families, neighbors, and the community. Supporting all Ohioans in this way as we age makes our communities, and our state, stronger.

While federal funding from the Older Americans Act provides money for programs and services including meals, transportation, and direct care services to help older adults maintain independence as they age, these funds have not kept pace with the needs of older Ohioans. Based on current federal budget proposals, funding is unlikely to increase, and may possibly decrease, for various Older Americans Act programs.

There are senior levies in 74 out of the 88 Ohio counties that support older adults in Ohio communities. Local levy dollars are exceedingly important to the provision of services for older Ohioans because they fill gaps when federal and state funds are not sufficient, and they are able to be tailored to meet local needs. In many communities, senior levy funds are used to match federal funds to maximize resources available for services.

Elimination of the Replacement Tax Levy: The proposed elimination of the replacement tax levy in House Bill 344 would severely limit the options available to local agencies. These levies allow for the agencies to ensure their budgets keep pace with inflation without eliminating revenue the voters have

already approved. Removing this tool unnecessarily complicates the process by which our local entities are funded.

Balancing Community Needs and Interests: Placing a tax levy on the ballot is a decision Area Agencies on Aging take seriously. They carefully consider community needs, economic conditions, and public sentiment. The current system allows for flexibility in selecting the most appropriate levy type, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are allocated efficiently and responsibly.

Transparency and Accountability: Transparency is essential in maintaining public trust. By involving the community in levy decisions, Area Agencies on Aging demonstrate their commitment to openness and responsiveness as responsible stewards of taxpayer funds. HB 344 risks undermining this transparency by limiting the options available to local leaders.

Preserving Flexibility for Local Agencies: One-size-fits-all solutions may not align with unique local needs. Keeping replacement levies available as a tool for local agencies allows them to tailor levies to specific circumstances. This flexibility is essential to maintaining agency effectiveness and responsiveness.

For these reasons, we request you delay any vote on HB 344 to allow us more time to engage with legislators and stakeholders about the issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Beth Kowalczyk', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Beth Kowalczyk, CEO

cc: Members of the Ohio House of Representatives