



**TESTIMONY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF SENIOR CENTERS**  
**TO THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGING AND OLDER ADULT SERVICES**

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**“Community Respite Services Programs”**

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Good morning ladies and gentleman, my name is Bill Pierce and I am the president of the Pennsylvania Association of Senior Centers and the executive director of the Downingtown Area Senior Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of legislation to support “Community Respite Services Programs” within the senior community center.

The Senior Center was first introduced in New York City in 1943 to provide social activities, nutritious meals, and case management services to adults aged 60 and older, especially those with low-incomes. Seventy years later, Senior Centers are recognized as one of the most widely utilized services supported by the Older Americans Act of 1965. An estimated 11,000 Senior Centers are helping millions of older adults from all walks of life continue to thrive within their communities.

Today’s Senior Centers are evolving to reflect a new view of aging; one that empowers the people they serve. They’re connecting older adults with meaningful work and volunteer opportunities, and increasing their access to valuable benefits and resources. Through evidence based programs, they’re helping older adults manage and improve their health and finances so they can continue to live in their homes for as long as possible.

As the Senior Centers of today are preparing themselves for a new generation of seniors, the boomers, the Senior Centers are creatively addressing the critical needs of a familiar generation of seniors, the current senior center participant. In support of their missions, today’s Senior Centers must craft programs and services that support not just the participant, but the participant’s families, caregivers and friends, all while keeping an eye towards the future economic sustainability of not just the programs they offer, but the Centers themselves. “Community Respite Services Programs” as defined in House Bill 1702 allow for consideration of the aforementioned points and allow Senior Centers the opportunity to mirror the vision of the Department by providing services at the right time, in the right setting, and at the right intensity.

Having been a member of the professional staff at Downingtown Area Senior Center for more than thirteen years, seven of which have been spent as the Executive Director, I have had the opportunity to witness first-hand the emerging needs of the individuals and the families we serve. An identified growing need is for programs and services that address a niche population of seniors; seniors who are experiencing mild cognitive and physical decline that would generally preclude their inclusion in Senior Center programming but allow them to function beyond the scope of care typical of an Adult Day Center. The individual is frail, but not dependent, and often shies from programs without the cueing of staff or volunteers; they often require mild assistance with simple tasks such as cutting their food, or opening their milk. Many times these individuals are able to cloak their limitations by relying on their Senior Center friends to support their independence, fearing that asking for help would force them out of the Senior Center. While it is important for Senior Centers to encourage, and support the social networks that are built among the participants who engage in our services, it is paramount for Senior Centers to ensure that each visitor, guest and user of the Senior Center has a complete and enjoyable experience, and “Community Respite Services Programs” allow just that.

A key goal of the “Community Respite Services Program” is to foster an environment of inclusion rather than seclusion. A fundamental aspect of this goal is to encourage the participant’s engagement in as many traditional programs and services as reasonably possible; offering everything, forcing nothing. For those who need a “quiet break” from the crowd, supplemental programming is planned and available every day, and every hour. In action, the “Community Respite Services Program” includes not just those who are enrolled, but often their Senior Center friends. The feeling of inclusion fosters a positive environment and a positive experience and supports the self-reliance of the individuals enrolled.

The events that followed the economic collapse of 2008 have dramatically impacted the ability of Senior Centers to maintain their financial sustainability. Realizing continued reductions in government

funding, foundation support, and individual giving have given cause for the centers to consider careful financial planning and broad strategic thinking. The creation of “Community Respite Services Programs” allows Senior Centers to support the individuals and families they serve, while also addressing the critical need to stabilize their funding by introducing consistent revenue streams.

Mindful collaboration and deliberate cooperation between Senior Centers, Adult Day Centers, the local AAA’s and the Department is paramount to the success of “Community Respite Services Programs.” These programs should strive to be critically linked to a multitude of community resources to guarantee that the individuals and the families served have access to the most appropriate resources when, and where, they are needed. Strategic partnerships between Senior Centers and Adult Day Centers would strengthen the social service network, and promise smooth transitions from “Community Respite Services Programs” to these more advanced levels of care.

As the current legislation suggests, “it is in the best interest of all Pennsylvanians to support policies that help older individuals maintain their independence and dignity in their homes and communities, while also providing assurance to their loved ones that they are safe and afforded access to care and services at the right time, in the right setting, and at the right intensity.” “Community Respite Services Programs” can provide the ends to that mean.