



THE AREA AGENCY ON AGING
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The Lew Davies Community Building
1034 Park Avenue • Meadville, Pennsylvania 16335

Pennsylvania Senate Aging and Youth Committee
Pennsylvania House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee
Joint Hearing Testimony
Older Adult Protective Services
April 29, 2019

Distinguished Chairman DiSanto, Chairwoman Collett, Chairman Murt, Chairman Samuelson, and other distinguished members of the Senate and House Aging Committees, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Krista Geer, I am the Executive Director of Active Aging, Inc, the Area Agency on Aging for Crawford County, as well as the President of Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging (P4A).

As you are aware, we are all here today to address the report released by the Office of the Inspector General in January of this year related to the oversight of protective services. Clearly this is an important matter and I appreciate the time and effort the OSIG put into this investigation.

I also appreciate the opportunity that this report has provided us to work with the Department of Aging closely to try to address some long standing issues. In fact, we have been meeting every other week and dedicating a significant amount of time to working through a thorough list of recommendations that come not only from the Inspector General's report, but also directly from the network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) that do this work on a daily basis.

Those recommendations are substantial, but include the need to revamp our current report of need form, update the software program our staff use while in the field to improve efficiencies and eliminate redundancies, as well as technical support to our case workers on the most complicated investigations related to financial exploitation. I recognize that these recommendations are not the same type as those provided by the Inspector General's office in the summary of their report. That is because the Inspector General's report focused on the

oversight of the protective service program, rather than the challenges that exist in the provision of those services. For example, the report recommends that the Department of Aging add additional staff and resources to oversee and monitor the Area Agencies on Aging and that the Department increase the training requirements for our staff. Those are fair and reasonable recommendations. Our staff should be adequately trained and our agencies should be held accountable. But what the report does not tell you is that additional resources for training and oversight will not even begin to address the root causes of these issues. These are symptoms of a larger problem. If adequate resources are not provided to our boots on the ground staff who receive and investigate these reports, no amount of training or oversight will ever resolve these issues.

Between FY 13/14 and FY 17/18, our network of Area Agencies on Aging across this Commonwealth have experienced a 57% increase in the number of reports of need received, resulting in a 53% increase in investigations. Until this current fiscal year, we have done so without any additional resources to allow us to hire additional staff to meet these increased demands. Last year's budget included \$2.1 additional dollars specifically designated to protective services. This year's proposed budget raises that to \$5 million. This is a great start and we appreciate both the Governor and the Legislature's efforts. But when you consider that \$5 million being spread across 52 Area Agencies on Aging, you have to acknowledge that it will be spread very thin. Just quick math will tell you that an even spread would only provide roughly \$96,000 per agency. If you spread it out according to population or any other factor, there will likely be areas that receive no funding to address a growing issue that affects us all. Of course my math assumes that the Department will not be using any of the funding to address their own needs. Our full request is for \$8 million, which is the amount requested by AAA's in our 2018 survey. If there are changes to legislation or other requirements, the amount needed will grow.

I would also like to clarify that these investigations are not simple ones. Our staff are often charged with delving into long standing, often dysfunctional family dynamics, highly sensitive and complicated issues, and complex financial labyrinths. They must do all of this while ensuring that the rights of the older adult are not compromised and that they are provided what they need in a manner that supports the dignity, respect and preference of the older adult in the least restrictive setting. What does all that mean? It means that older adults are not

automatically incapable of making decisions the day they turn 60. As adults capable of understanding and accepting the consequences of their actions, we have no right to force an older adult to do anything. They have the right, just like the rest of us, to make bad decisions. Our job is to determine if they have the capacity to understand and accept the consequences of their actions before infringing upon their lives with any intervening actions. Making that determination often involves doctors and psychiatrists, as well as others. We do not take lightly the implications of stripping an individual of their right to self-determination. Nor should we.

Crawford County is a mid-sized county in the northwest corner of our Commonwealth. The reports of need in our area have increased 97% since FY 13/14. Our investigations have increased 62%. We have absorbed this increase without additional staff and while still maintaining our “green” status during our monitoring from PDA. This increase in the number of investigations is significant. The majority of the time spent in the provision of protective services is spent doing an investigation. Our investigators must work through multiple, sometimes conflicting perceptions and details to determine what steps, if any, our agency can take to mitigate the current risk, all while keeping the older adult safe in a manner that maintains their dignity and allows them the right to determine, whenever possible, what is best for themselves. Investigators have to seek information from collateral contacts who may have information relevant to the case. These contacts often include physicians and bank staff who have records that are vital to our investigation. Obtaining those documents can take over three weeks, depending on the source, already putting our investigation past the 20 day goal.

When the additional \$2.1 million was provided last budget cycle, we had no assurances that it would be an ongoing increase and we knew that the most we could hope for would be \$38,000. We cannot hire additional staff for \$38,000. So we requested a little less and contracted a forensic accountant that could assist our staff with financial exploitation cases. Please keep in mind that protective services is only one program we administer and every program is experiencing significant growth as our aging population explodes. The need for home delivered meals, personal care services and emergency response devices has increased along the same levels as protective services in the last several years. Your Area Agency on Aging administrators are faced with very real decisions every day that quite simply come down to: do we provide someone with a meal, or do we create a waiting list of people who need to eat so we can have more staff doing investigations. Those decisions are taking a toll.

Our system is at a crisis point. The number of seniors in our Commonwealth is growing rapidly, their needs are expanding just as rapidly, yet resources for the network charged with ensuring their safety has been largely stagnate for the better part of a decade. And this is the result.

Pennsylvania's older adults deserve a comprehensive approach to addressing their needs. The work done by AAAs can delay or eliminate the need for more expensive services, like Medicaid Long Term Care, and also serves as a way to keep older adults safe. Such services relieve the burden on caregivers, function as an early warning system that someone is in need, and keep people in their homes longer – which is where we all want to be. This can't be done without adequate support to the safety net. It's time we demonstrate our commitment to older Pennsylvanians and strengthen the system charged with serving them.

Respectfully submitted

Krista L. Geer

Executive Director

Active Aging, Inc.