



Testimony of

Robert Torres, Acting Secretary

Pennsylvania Department of Aging

Joint Hearing of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee and the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee

Public Hearing on the Office of the State Inspector General's Report on the Department of Aging's County-Based System for Monitoring Elder Abuse

April 29, 2019

Good morning Chairman DiSanto, Chairwoman Collett, Chairman Murt, Chairman Samuelson, and members of both the Senate Aging & Youth Committee and the House Aging & Older Adult Services Committee. With me today is Denise Getgen, Director of the Protective Services Office at the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA), who oversees the provision of technical assistance, monitoring, and compliance for protective services provided by the local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) throughout the Commonwealth. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the department's response to the September 2018 investigation report by the Office of State Inspector General (OSIG) on PDA's Monitoring of County-Based Agencies That Investigate Allegations of Elder Abuse.

The department is steadfast in its duties to protect vulnerable older adults from abuse, neglect, abandonment, and exploitation. This is a bedrock principle for the department which we take very seriously, as it is required both by the state Older Adults Protective Services Act and the federal Older Americans Act. In addition, it is embedded in the department's foundation of prevention and protection outlined in our 2016-2020 State Plan on Aging. Nevertheless, the department can and will always strive to improve.

The investigation and subsequent report by the OSIG highlighted findings which the department has and will continue to address. I'd like to thank State Inspector General Beemer for his agency's diligence, support and cooperation throughout this process. Although many improvement measures were already in place prior to the release of the report, the department, working with the AAAs, continues to pursue opportunities for further refinement related to the findings identified in the report.

Unfortunately, elder abuse is on the rise in Pennsylvania. The department has experienced a continued increase in the number and complexity of elder abuse reports. For example, the department experienced a 60% increase in the number of reports received and a 61% increase in the number of reports substantiated from fiscal years 2014-15 to 2017-18. This trend has numerous causes – a growing aging population, increased awareness of protective services, increased ability to perpetrate financial exploitation, among others. The problem is neither disappearing nor is it likely to decrease in the future. As a result, these factors place added

pressure on the department and the AAAs' resources to meet the needs of older adults at risk. The OSIG report highlighted these challenges and identified opportunities for improvement.

The OSIG report highlighted several findings; inadequacy of the AAAs in meeting timelines for face-to-face visits and determination of cases; insufficient training provided by PDA to the AAAs; inadequate monitoring of the AAAs by PDA; a lack of timely guidance to the AAAs by PDA; and inadequate internal staffing for protective services at PDA.

When the OSIG's investigation began in May of 2017, the department was already working to improve its monitoring of the delivery of protective services and better position the department to improve quality while facing the growing need. The work resulted in the creation of an updated monitoring tool and process used by the department for oversight. This tool has helped standardize the process and measures by which AAAs are monitored. Prior to the implementation of this new monitoring protocol, each AAA was only monitored once annually, regardless of the findings. Now, not only are annual visits occurring, follow-up monitoring can occur every six months or quarterly, depending on the level of deficiencies identified in the prior monitoring visit. This has helped identify and address concerns more quickly and enabled the department to work collaboratively with the AAAs on addressing instances of noncompliance. The AAAs have been cooperative and diligent in their efforts to improve and meet the demand.

To improve the timeliness of investigations, the department is making changes to the Investigation, Summary, and Assessment (ISA) form to allow for more accurate data collection regarding the timing of the required face-to-face visits. Additionally, the department is updating policies regarding procedure and documentation standards and locating older adults who may be missing. The department has also created a report for the AAAs to access, which provides each AAA with a "snapshot" of cases with missing information or those approaching the regulatory required deadline for case substantiation. This measure allows AAAs to prioritize cases in real-time and ensure more timely assistance to older adults. Additionally, Temple University's Institute for Protective Services, the department's contracted training services provider, has added staff to help AAAs meet the growing demand of financial exploitation cases. We know that these types of cases typically take longer to investigate than most other types of abuse cases because of the nature and volume of records to examine. Temple has staff with expertise in conducting financial exploitation cases including a certified fraud examiner. This is a great asset in providing this much needed expertise to AAAs.

In regard to training, a new Intake Worker training curriculum, jointly developed by PDA and Temple incorporating feedback from the AAAs, has been created. This training is more comprehensive, covers all required content per the regulations, includes a reference guide, and requires a passing score of 80% on a competency evaluation. Through PDA's efforts, Temple has increased enrichment trainings from 7 to 14 annually. In fact, much of the training offered goes beyond what is required in regulation. In early 2019, PDA also hired a Director of Education & Outreach to ensure available trainings are updated and easily accessible. Through that work, we have added online training modules for AAA staff in the field to access as needed.

To ensure timely guidance is given, the department has streamlined the process for issuing Aging Program Directives (APD) and Aging Technical Assistance Bulletins (ATAB). The department has standardized its monitoring results letters to expedite delivery to the AAAs. PDA is also revising its monitoring APD to allow for the monitoring of active cases, as opposed to reviewing only closed cases. To better provide technical assistance to the AAAs, the department has added staff to its protective services office. PDA will also continue to look for

opportunities to create efficiencies and streamline processes that empower staff to accomplish more value-added work.

Finally, I want to thank each of you and your colleagues in the General Assembly for the inclusion of \$2.1 million for protective services in last year's budget. That funding enabled the AAA network to hire additional staff, add capacity to handle financial exploitation cases, and more. We appreciate this support and hope that the same support will be forthcoming for the additional \$2.8 million in Governor Wolf's proposed budget for fiscal year 2019-2020.

While the report highlighted challenges and opportunities for the department and the AAAs, I am proud of our team at the department and all the local protective services staff across the commonwealth who have and continue to meet these challenges. There is still much work to do, but we will continue to collaborate with the AAAs and seek support from the General Assembly to further protect and serve the most vulnerable. Thank you for all that you do to support the aging services network and thank you for the opportunity to advocate on behalf of the elder population we serve.