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Testimony - Rebecca May-Cole, Executive Director of the PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging

**House Gaming Oversight Committee
June 10, 2019**

Chairman Marshall, Chairman Nielson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today.

My name is Rebecca May-Cole, and I am the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging, or P4A. Thank you holding a hearing to discuss the importance of the Pennsylvania Lottery, and for providing me time today to share with all of you how critical the Lottery Fund is to the services and programs provided through the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) network.

P4A represents the 52 AAAs that serve Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Seniors come to their local AAA when they are in need of services to help them age comfortably in their communities. AAAs are the go-to, "no wrong door," community partners where seniors and their caregivers can learn about the services available to them. AAAs come in many different shapes and sizes, and can be part of county government or can operate as a stand-alone, or part of, a nonprofit. They adjust to serve the needs of seniors, which are different from community to community, rural and urban, small and large.

Pennsylvania's AAAs have more than 40 years of experience and expertise in facilitating the delivery of services to seniors, and we appreciate the opportunity to share what we have learned about the value of the Lottery Fund.

Established in 1971, the Pennsylvania Lottery continues to be the only state lottery in which all of the net revenue goes to programs that benefit older residents. It provides funding for numerous important services and programs, including property tax relief, rent rebates, free and reduced-fare transportation, funding for prescription assistance, programs to protect older adults, and home and community-based services. The ongoing use of these dollars for senior programs is a clear demonstration of the Commonwealth's commitment to help older adults remain in their homes and communities. We must protect the Lottery Fund in order to ensure these services and

programs continue to exist. In fact, ongoing efforts need to be made to strengthen the Lottery Fund as we continue to see our aging population increase. Now is not the time to allow funds to be diverted from the Lottery Fund.

AAAs work with public and private partners to provide the right supports, promoting independence and healthy aging, and enable all of us to stay connected and engaged as we age. Transportation, meals, housing assistance, home care, and other types of support prevent social isolation and connect us to our communities. AAAs leverage federal, state and local resources so they have the flexibility to ensure their communities' local needs and preferences are taken into consideration and the resulting local delivery system is tailored to their communities.

The Lottery provides funding to AAAs, which in turn offer and facilitate services and programs for seniors in each unique community. The Lottery funds the PennCare block grant program, which is a major funding source for the AAAs across the Commonwealth. PennCare enables AAAs to provide education and outreach activities, ombudsman services, protective services, family caregiver supports, the nursing home transition program, and the OPTIONS program.

OPTIONS provides home and community-based services to individuals aged 60 and over. The purpose of the program is two-fold, as it 1) assists older adults in maintaining their independence in the community and 2) delays the need for more costly care and services. Some programs funded by OPTIONS include:

1. in-home meal service;
2. personal care and home support;
3. home modifications;
4. medical devices and equipment, and
5. transportation.

OPTIONS provides services that often mean the difference between an individual aging in their community with dignity, choice, and freedom, or an accident that causes an individual to end up in a skilled nursing facility; once this happens, they are not likely to return to their community. OPTIONS is a cost-saver for the State, and we implore the Administration and the Legislature to dedicate more funds to this vital program. These non-Medicaid services support the older adult, delaying and/or diverting them from Medicaid enrollment. Due to limited funding, many services have been reduced or eliminated. For example, Senior Community Center hours and locations have been reduced. In addition, there are currently approximately 3,900 people on waiting lists for services because of inadequate resources.

Another very important program funded through the Lottery Fund is Older Adult Protective Services. Over the past five years, referrals for investigation have increased 57%, further stretching the dollars allocated from the Lottery Fund. As I'm sure you are aware, the legislature and Governor provided for a \$2million increase to help meet the needs of these very vulnerable older adults, with an additional \$3million included in the Governor's proposed budget. In reality, AAAs are asking for a total of \$8m to be provided and earmarked to protective services. Now is not the time to allow funds to be diverted from the Lottery Fund.

The older adult population in Pennsylvania continues to grow, the Census predicting individuals over age 65 will comprise 25% of the total Pennsylvania population by 2030. This means there will be an increase in demand for Lottery Funded services. Now is not the time to allow funds to be diverted from the Lottery Fund. P4A strongly supports any efforts to strengthen the Lottery Fund.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts Representative Hahn, Senator Tomlinson and others are making to protect the Lottery Fund. We ask that this committee stand with older Pennsylvanians and support all efforts that will ensure our seniors receive programs and services that are provided with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Thank you for inviting P4A to provide testimony today.