

Pennsylvania Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
And Senate Aging and Youth Committee  
Pennsylvania House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee  
And House Human Services Committee  
Joint Hearing Testimony  
August 23, 2021  
Provided by  
JR Reed, Executive Director  
Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services

Chair Brooks, Chair Haywood, Chair Ward, Chair Collett, Chair Day, Chair Samuelson, Chair Farry and Chair Cruz, Health and Human Services, Aging and Youth, Aging and Older Adult Services and Human Services Committee members, Committee Staff Members and Guests:

Thank you to all the chairs, members and staff of these congressional committees and to all the guests listening today. I really appreciate being invited to speak on this very important topic that is on the agenda. My name is JR Reed, Executive Director of Lehigh County Office of Aging and Adult Services. In my 22 years working in the Aging Network I have spent several years working as a care manager that enrolled individuals into the waiver programs. I also worked as an assessor for medical eligibility into skilled nursing homes and waiver programs prior to becoming an Executive Director.

I was invited to discuss my perspective on concerns about changing the current process of enrollment and assessment and choosing Maximus as the provider for these services to assist individuals in the aging and disability communities. I believe that these services are best administered at the local level with a local presence. These services have been done this way for many years, especially the assessment part. Local level understanding by the current providers (Area Agency on Aging's) and

partnerships with entities in each community (hospitals, doctors offices, home health agencies and so-on) will be lost with choosing an outside entity with no local presence. These working relationships have been developed over the years between the Area Agency on Agings and the community partners. If this contract is moved forward with Maximus these relationships will be lost and it will create a lot more gaps in guiding consumers through the eligibility process.

In Lehigh County our Department of Human Services has worked extremely hard to develop an integrated approach to any case that comes to the department. A lot of cases need assistance from two or more offices. This approach makes sure that the needs of the whole family are taken into consideration and the services are client centered. Area Agency on Agings are able to take this approach currently because of our interaction with clients during the assessment process and the relationships that we have with local entities. Referrals can be made for older Americans act services or lottery funded services or whatever client needs that are identified. This will be lost if the assessment function is given to an outside entity that doesn't have a local presence, the familiarity with the community partners and the overall understanding of how Human Services work in each community. The end result is that it negatively impacts older adults or those with disabilities in the commonwealth.

I want to discuss the current status of the enrollment process into waiver programs and life programs. My colleagues have mentioned all the issues back a few years ago when Maximus took over the enrollment process for those 60 and over. I want to discuss what has occurred since that transition as it is well established that it was a very poor transition with many issues that occurred and individuals that fell through the cracks. Because of these issues and concerns The Department of Aging looked into adapting some federal funding through ADRC's (The Link Program) to assist individuals with being navigated through the Medicaid process. They adapted a few of the rules after consulting with the federal government and then Area Agency on Agings were encouraged to utilize a program called Person Centered Counseling. This program did not increase the amount of federal

funds coming to PA Department of Aging. It took funds that were currently coming in and utilized some of those funds for Person Centered Counseling services specifically to assist individuals to navigate this process. The reimbursement is \$105 per successful individual enrolled into a waiver program. Lehigh County currently averages 15-20 every month. This funding does not adequately reimburse for the time that is spent assisting these individuals and families. Area Agency on Agings are mission driven to advocate for older adults to get the appropriate assistance to meet their care needs. We see a need and find a way to assist. Funding is going to Maximus currently to assist with enrollment from PA Department of Human Services and some federal funding from PDA has been adapted to also assist in the same process. This right here points to problems with the process. Lehigh County also averages 3 cases per week in our Information and Referral unit that are problematic. We receive phone calls from families and older adults that have not been followed up with by Maximus, are confused by the process or have other varying issues. We problem solve these cases and try to assist the families with getting information and resolving these issues.

When Lehigh County Caseworkers have assisted consumers in various cases, we have found that Maximus does not follow-up in a timely manner or even at all with consumers about missing pieces of information to process their cases through the County Assistance Office. When our caseworkers call Maximus on behalf of the client to find out what is missing they often claim that the piece of information was sent to the County Assistance Office. Then another phone call happens later when the information is still missing and Maximus then claims that the consumer never sent in the information. This is very frustrating to the consumers and their families. It seems there is a number of issues with Maximus getting physician certifications from consumers' doctors. This is a required form to become eligible. Lehigh County Caseworkers are having to assist with contacting the physician's offices and assisting with getting this form to Maximus on a fairly frequent basis. There was a recent case that was called into our office and the consumer had applied three months earlier and had waited for follow-up with Maximus thinking they had applied and would hear soon about being eligible. They called my office and we found

out that the physician certification wasn't received and the application had been sent to the County Assistance Office. The application was at the County Assistance Office over 60 days so it was denied because this form was not received. Now the whole application needs completed again and submitted and a caseworker is now assisting them with the process from Lehigh County.

We have also experienced issues with Maximus in handling some of our Spanish speaking consumers. They don't always send out all the forms in Spanish. There seems to be more confusion with our Spanish speaking families and not understanding the process even after Maximus has contacted them. One of our bi-lingual caseworkers had to interpret in Spanish for the consumer and the family when they were meeting with Maximus on a case.

A local Hospice provider caseworker told Lehigh County intake that it takes at the bare minimum 3 months to get on the waiver program. But it usually takes closer to 6 months for them to become eligible. Their clients don't have this amount of time to be without services. In addition they don't have the ability to process all the paperwork and Maximus is not very helpful with their clients. They feel that Maximus is not as responsive as they should be with Hospice patients. With Maximus it is hard to get in contact with someone who knows what is going on with their case and they don't follow-up very quickly. The local hospice case worker said Pennsylvania sends a message out that they want to assist individuals and families to stay in their homes by providing long term service. However, working through this process with Maximus sends another message when the consumer has to reach out to other agencies for assistance and finds it very difficult to get services.

We reached out to some of the local hospital caseworkers to get feedback on their recent experiences with Maximus. The caseworkers from these hospitals all said that Maximus continues to have long waiting periods with processing referrals. They have experienced long waiting times on the

phone to talk to someone at Maximus. When they talk to individuals at Maximus those individuals don't know the case. They tell the caseworker they will receive a return call in 6-8 weeks. Often these return calls don't occur from Maximus.

One of the most concerning issues with the local hospitals is the assessment piece that the Area Agency on Aging currently performs. The same assessment is done for Medicaid eligibility for skilled nursing facilities. Local hospitals need this assessment to be done quickly so that discharges can happen in a timely manner. If that doesn't happen then there are costs that would occur that would not be covered by insurances. Who is going to cover these costs? The current process for assessment works well with local hospitals because of the relationships that have been developed at the local level. An outside entity without a local presence is going to struggle with being able to manage this assessment part. One of the local hospital caseworkers was concerned about this process being changed. They noted that these assessments need to be completed quickly and with the appropriate paperwork completed accurately. They feel that if Maximus is doing this part they will not be timely and it will drive health care costs up at hospitals. They want this process to stay at the local level where they can reach out and get a timely phone call back to resolve issues. This will be better for consumers and families.

I really believe with Maximus's past performance in Pennsylvania and with the information about Maximus available on the internet that we need to take a pause and re-think this current enrollment/assessment bid contract. We all understand that we need to be fiscally responsible but part of that is choosing the correct contractor to provide services in a quality fashion that serves our most vulnerable populations well. More costs and impacts can be incurred by the commonwealth if this important service isn't provided in a timely, quality and caring way. We all know that it costs more money to serve someone in a skilled nursing facility or hospital. When a contractor of this service isn't timely and responsive then more individuals will have longer stays in hospitals and will end up in skilled nursing facilities. The

most important part is that older adults and those with disabilities will not receive the assistance they need without a quality contractor.

Thank you again for inviting me to come and discuss this important issue with all of you.