



Secretary of Aging  
Teresa Osborne

House Appropriations Committee Hearing  
Wednesday, February 24, 2016

Chairman Adolph, Chairman Markosek and Members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present Governor Wolf's Proposed Fiscal Year 2016-2017 budget for the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

The mission of the Department of Aging ("department") is to "enhance the quality of life of all older Pennsylvanians by empowering diverse communities, the family and the individual." As the State Unit on Aging, the Department is responsible to facilitate the development of home and community based services and supports by building capacity in the community, promote quality programs to meet the needs of older Pennsylvanians while supporting their caregivers, represent the commonwealth's interests in the design and implementation of all long-term services and supports programs and foster strategic partnerships among federal, state and local decision makers. Each of these roles is valued as they ensure that the Department remains attentive to the underpinnings of the Older Americans Act (OAA.)

Enacted in 1965, the OAA provides essential services to our most vulnerable seniors, age 60 and older and requires all State Units on Aging to target services to "older individuals with the greatest economic need and older individuals with the greatest social need, with particular attention to low-income minority individuals, older individuals residing in rural areas, low-income individuals and frail individuals." Furthermore, under the OAA, the Department is required to develop and administer a State Plan on Aging, serve as an effective and visible advocate for older individuals by reviewing and commenting upon all state plans, budgets and policies which affect older individuals and provide technical assistance to any agency or individual representing the needs of older adults.

As a Department entrusted with these responsibilities, we are therefore committed to Governor Wolf's vision that a government that works is a government that is responsive and responsible in fulfilling its duty to provide essential services for our most vulnerable citizens. I am honored to be part of Governor Wolf's leadership team as he has tasked me and those I work most closely with to share in this commitment to serve and protect our growing senior population. Currently, 2.9 million Pennsylvanians are age 60 and over, and our state ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of seniors age 85 and over. With these statistics in mind, we also recognize that research shows that nearly 70% of individuals reaching age 60 are expected to need long-term services and supports at some point during their lifetime. It is imperative, therefore, that we take the steps necessary to

ensure that we can continue to fulfill our mission and duty to prevent the instability of health and wellness by enabling citizens to age in place with dignity and to protect the most vulnerable from abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment.

Governor Wolf's proposed 2016-17 budget poses two distinct realities for Pennsylvania's future: one that ensures that government fulfills its duty to provide essential social services for its most vulnerable citizens, including older Pennsylvanians; or one that will cause our seniors hardship by way of significant property tax increases at the local level, higher out of pocket costs for prescription drug benefits, and waiting lists for home and community based services. The governor's plan includes investments in education which will stave off increased property taxes, restores funding for human services programs, which includes long-term services and supports that enable older Pennsylvanians to age in place, and outreach to our rural communities wherein seniors are often hit the hardest. It also ensures that the Department of Aging upholds its responsibilities under the OAA by providing programs designed to protect seniors from fraud and abuse, offers access to health and wellness programs, and creates opportunities for positive civic engagement through community volunteer and senior employment programs. Additionally, rooted within the department's budget are strategic partnerships and synergies with sister agencies to continue other services our older residents rely on such as nutritional support, housing, and heating assistance that together provide a safety net for our most vulnerable older residents.

Pennsylvania's seniors have worked hard to raise their families, build our communities and protect our country in times of crisis. They deserve to live their lives without fear of losing their home due to skyrocketing local property taxes or not being able to afford their prescription medications. As a former director of two local Area Agencies in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I look forward to working with you, the Aging Network and other concerned stakeholders in the days ahead to ensure that a government that works is a government that commits funding to Pennsylvanians in need of home and community based services, delivers quality, cost effective care, focuses on outcomes, and protects its most vulnerable citizens.