



Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Inc.

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

Joint House Health and Aging and Older Adult Services Committees on the Proposed Consolidation of the Departments of Human Services, Health, Aging, and Drug and Alcohol Programs

April 17, 2017

Chairman Hennessey, Chairman Samuelson, Chairman Baker, and Chairman Fabrizio,

Thank you holding this hearing regarding the proposed four agency consolidation, and for providing a forum for stakeholders to provide input for your consideration.

The Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging is deeply committed to improved service coordination and delivery for seniors. The AAA network is constantly thinking through ways to meet the needs of seniors in a rapidly changing service delivery environment. The P4A membership has 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 over the decades.

On February 7th, Governor Wolf announced his proposal to combine the services provided through the Departments of Health, Aging, Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Human Services, into one agency. P4A formed an ad-hoc committee of its members to examine the proposal and consulted colleagues in other states that have experienced similar consolidations.

The AAA network appreciates the Legislature's commitment to our consumers. The typical senior served by a AAA is a 79-year-old widowed female living just above the poverty level; she is not eligible for Medicaid, but also has a very limited income. If Pennsylvania's senior service delivery system fails her, the consequences could be fatal. The unique needs of seniors must be deeply understood, valued, and prioritized. With this as our focus, P4A would like to provide the following thoughts regarding the consolidation proposal:

P4A supports these concepts when looking for ways to better serve Pennsylvania's older adults:

- 1. more effective collaboration between offices and departments;**
- 2. enhanced program effectiveness;**
- 3. the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy;**
- 4. the efficient use of land, buildings, leases, and space; and**
- 5. the merging of human resource departments across agencies.**

Additionally, P4A supports merging information technology across agencies – this could lead to improved data collection and facilitate sharing across different offices serving the same consumer, which could improve their health outcomes. The Centers for Disease Control has long focused on this effort through its Program Collaboration and Service Integration program. We support any efforts in streamlining and improving data systems to ultimately improve service delivery.

P4A strongly believes the following principles must be followed in order to ensure that Pennsylvania is addressing the needs of its older population, a population that is slated to grow to an amazing 28 percent of our Commonwealth's population by 2024.

A Voice to advocate on behalf of the unique needs of seniors must be maintained. The current Pennsylvania Department of Aging is a State agency with a cabinet-level secretary. Through the federal Older Americans Act the Aging Secretary has the jurisdiction, power, and duty to advance the well-being of Pennsylvania's older citizens. P4A is concerned that losing a cabinet-level advocate for Pennsylvania's aging adults means a diminishment of the senior voice. The most obvious way to maintain that voice is to not combine PDA with other agencies. If consolidation were to move forward, we respectfully urge consideration of the following:

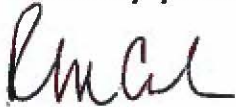
1. keep a cabinet-level advocate for seniors;
2. create a separate Office of Aging within the proposed new agency; and
3. redistribute staff roles so all aging-related services and funding fall within the Office of Aging, regardless of funding source.

The community-based, No Wrong Door infrastructure for seniors must be maintained. The value of "no wrong door" for a senior cannot be understated. Having a consistent place in every planning and service area where older adults and their families can physically go to across the Commonwealth that seniors can rely on is incredibly important; this consistency is provided through our AAA network. A great deal has changed in senior service delivery in just a couple of years. For example, modifications to enrollment has resulted in AAAs assisting numerous seniors who have become confused after being mailed a packet and/or receiving an automated phone call with a recording on the other end of the line, instead of being enrolled in services through their local AAA through personal interactions. Our network is aligned with the Governor's "one stop shop" philosophy, as AAAs truly are the stop for Pennsylvania's seniors. We respectfully request that the current "one stop shop" for seniors be maintained through Pennsylvania's local AAA network by legislation that assures any changes to the number of AAAs in the future be done with some sort of legislative oversight.

Ensure that the Lottery Fund continues to be used to support seniors living in their homes and communities. 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. Initially targeted to provide property tax relief for Pennsylvania seniors, Lottery-funded programs have since grown to include home and community-based services facilitated by AAAs, rent rebates, free and reduced-fare transportation, funding for PACE and PACENET, and funding for senior centers. The ongoing use of these dollars in this fashion is a clear demonstration of the Commonwealth's commitment to help seniors live in their homes and communities. The Lottery Fund provides services to seniors who are not financially eligible for Medicaid – people who have worked hard their whole lives, but are not quite eligible for Medicaid and need a helping hand to continue to live in their communities. AAAs have been able to maximize the way these dollars are used by leveraging local resources and in-kind donations, to further this, the state's Lottery Fund must continue to be utilized for these services. Therefore, we respectfully request that the legislature ensure that the Lottery Fund continues to be used for these purposes.

Thank you for inviting me to provide our input as a stakeholder on behalf of Pennsylvania's older adults. P4A will continue to evaluate the proposal as more information is shared, always keeping the needs of seniors at the center of what we do.

Sincerely yours,



Rebecca May-Cole
Executive Director