



**Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging,
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**Testimony of Art DiLoreto,
Deputy Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging
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Joint Senate Health and Human Services, Aging and Youth, Intergovernmental Operations, and Senate Appropriation's Health and Human Services Subcommittee Committee Hearing regarding the Proposed Unification of the Departments of Human Services, Health, Aging, and Drug and Alcohol Programs

Chairwomen Baker, Schwank, Brooks, and Bartolotta, Chairmen Haywood and Williams, and Members of the Committees,

Thank you for holding hearings across the state regarding the proposed four-agency unification proposal, and providing a forum for stakeholders to provide input for your consideration. My name is Art DiLoreto and I am providing this testimony on behalf of Rebecca May-Cole, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Area Agencies on Aging, or P4A, who could not be here today.

P4A represents the 52 area agencies on aging across the Commonwealth and subsequently the seniors they serve. Our membership has over 40 years of experience and expertise in facilitating the delivery of senior services, and we appreciate the opportunity to share what we have learned over the decades.

The AAA network appreciates the General Assembly's commitment to our consumers. To give you an idea of who that is: the typical consumer served by an 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 dire.

We are here today to testify that the unique needs of seniors must be deeply understood, valued, and prioritized. To that end, we provide the following for your consideration.

P4A supports several of the concepts that were introduced with the proposal, as the network believes many provide avenues that could result in better service delivery for seniors, including:

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

P4A also supports merging information technology across agencies, which could lead to improved data collection and facilitate data sharing across different offices serving the same consumer, ultimately improving their health outcomes. The Centers for Disease Control has focused on this effort through its Program Collaboration and Service Integration (PCSI) program, and we think that the principles behind the PCSI program apply to all health-related agencies. We support any efforts to streamline and improve data systems and hope to be included in those conversations as they move forward.

We support these concepts, and believe consolidation and unification of functions is an admirable goal. AAAs, however, MUST be part of the conversation in implementing these types of initiatives if they move forward. We thank the Governor's Office for including us in the stakeholder conversations to date. We think that these conversations need to be more frequent and more substantive, so this level of detail can be discussed. The legislation did not, nor did we expect it to, express any proposals for implementing the above concepts. However, the organizational charts provided on the Governor's website did not provide insight into these concepts, or the reasoning behind how the organizational charts were decided upon. We are aware that the Governor's Office is working with nine subcommittees and that their feedback ultimately resulted in the organizational charts, but the reasoning behind the charts has not been discussed

with us yet. We are hopeful that a stakeholder meeting can be scheduled in the next week or two with members of the subcommittees present to explain to stakeholders the reasoning. Only when we have all the information will we be able to understand the reasoning and be able to comment on the proposed reorganization from a fully educated standpoint.

P4A has testified a few times now regarding three Core Principles that the network believes must be integrated should the unification proposal move forward. Implementation actions that embrace these Core Principles will ensure that Pennsylvania continues its outstanding work in addressing the needs of older adults, a population that is slated to grow to an amazing 28 percent of our Commonwealth's population by 2024.

Core Principle #1: 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, especially at a time of unprecedented growth in the aging population. The most obvious way to maintain that voice is to establish a Department of Aging. Seniors in Pennsylvania fought to elevate the Office of Aging back in the 1970's to a Department of Aging, and now we have an even larger segment of our population over the age of 60 in need of a voice. The state of Pennsylvania is able to honor that desire while still streamlining and improving services within a newly envisioned Department of Aging. The Governor's draft unification amendment appears to move many functions and services for older adults to the Office of Aging and Adult Community Living. This is a good step in the right direction and we further suggest that these unifying steps be done within a Department of Aging. The amendment also establishes the Pennsylvania Council of Aging within the Governor's Office and creates an Executive Director position to the Council that reports directly to the Governor. P4A

appreciates this attempt to maintain the voice of our seniors. However, we believe that the legislation needs to go further, to specify that this voice be in a Department of Aging.

Core Principle #2: The current 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 Aging Waiver enrollment have resulted in confusion for seniors. AAAs have assisted numerous seniors who have become perplexed after being mailed an application 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. I’ll note here that the Governor’s Office unveiled a website regarding consolidation last week, and that website stated “...older Pennsylvanians will still go to their AAAs when they have questions about these services, just like they do today.” We are grateful that the Governor expressed this commitment to maintaining our role in senior service delivery.

To further protect the AAA network during a possible agency unification, we respectfully request that our current “one stop shop” network for seniors be maintained by including in the amendment a mechanism that assures any future proposal to change the role of AAAs be done with legislative oversight.

Core Principle #3: 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 effort, the state's Lottery Fund must continue to be utilized for these services. The Governor's webpage regarding unification state that "the creation of this department will have no impact on how Lottery Fund dollars are used to support senior programs. The important services funded through the Lottery will continue." The draft unification legislation also state that it is the intent of the legislature to continue to utilize Lottery Funds as outlined in the Lottery Law. Again, we thank the Governor in expressing his ongoing support for the senior services provided through the Lottery Fund.

The AAA network continues to believe that we must do more to ensure that the Lottery Fund continues to be used for the purposes that they are used for today. I also suggest that the legislature implement iLottery as part of the budget package, as P4A believes that implementing iLottery is crucial to continuing to provide services for seniors across the state.

Conclusion

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.