

OHIO STATE SENATE  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Respectively Submitted of:  
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Thursday, January 11, 2024

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Craig, and Members of the Senate Select Committee on Housing: on behalf of our CEO Dr. E. Douglas Beach, and as the Chief Performance Officer of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA), thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee on what we all know to be a very timely and challenging issue. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the committee for recognizing the importance of visiting various communities across the state. In doing so, you are providing an invaluable opportunity for organizations that might not otherwise be able to travel to Columbus to have their voices heard.

As the largest of Ohio's 12 area agencies on aging, WRAAA administers a wide variety of federal, state, local, and private funds used to provide home- and community-based services, care management, and other support for older adults and those with disabilities throughout our five-county region (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina). Such services help provide choices and support, enabling our consumers to live safely and independently in their own homes. This includes helping to ensure those homes remain safe, accessible, and able to meet the needs of those we serve as they age in place.

Throughout much of the committee's hearings, you have heard about the many challenges of finding and expanding affordable housing. And rightfully so, as this is indeed a challenge being felt statewide. However, it is just as important that there be programs that help maintain our housing stock and keep residents in their homes for longer. Without the costly repairs and upkeep sponsored by these programs, residents face displacement and the hardship of finding new housing while on a fixed income.

Ohio's Housing Assistance Grant Program is a state program that enables non-profits such as WRAAA to use grant dollars to contract with local providers for repairs and accessibility projects. The program has demonstrated both efficacy and efficiency in meeting the needs of our consumers, and we encourage the committee to explore further ways to institutionalize and expand upon programs such as these.

Like many other nonprofits, WRAAA is constantly looking for creative ways for funding to meet the needs of those they serve. To that end, we have secured one-time federal grant money, and I am proud to report that through our *WRAAAWorks!* and *Nails It!* programs, we are helping to keep older adults throughout our service area in their homes by facilitating home modifications such as wheelchair ramps, grab bars, and other ADA-compliant upgrades.

And the value of these dollars to the community goes beyond home repairs and maintenance. Through these programs, we are incorporating a youth mentoring program that engages and redirects at-risk youth away from criminal activities and/or incarceration, academic failure, and unemployment. However, as I mentioned, these programs were possible via one-time federal dollars. Given the unpredictable political environment in our nation's capital for the foreseeable future, we would like to see the state play a more substantial role in this space. The state- and federally-enabled programs I discussed epitomize successful private-public partnerships and are a low-risk, high-reward investment by the state, in addition to being facilitated by trusted partners.

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**Western Reserve**  
Area Agency on Aging

The majority of aging adults prefer to remain in their own homes and in the communities that they helped build and sustain. Per 2020 Census projections, Ohio is on pace to become one of a handful of states that will have **more residents aged 60 and older than people under age 20**. The policy implications and challenges for the growing needs of older adults are going to be significant.

I reiterate my gratitude to you, Chairwoman Reynolds, and members of the Select Committee on Housing Committee for the opportunity to offer this testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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