



OAAAA spurs Home First expansion

Legislation to allow more elderly Ohioans to receive care at home is attracting widespread bipartisan support. Advocates for older adults, organized by the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, spurred legislators to introduce a bill to expand the Home First program. Hearings started in the Ohio House and Senate last week.

Ohio's Home First program allows older adults at risk for nursing facility placement to bypass waiting lists in order to receive home and community care, such as the PASSPORT and Assisted Living waiver programs.

Legislation to expand this option to more seniors was introduced in December by Sen. John Carey (R-Wellston) and Sen. Dale Miller (D-Cleveland). Rep. Debbie Newcomb (D-Conneaut) and Rep. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) introduced HB 398, a companion bill in the Ohio House.

Senator Carey, who chairs the Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee hearing the bill, broke with protocol to allow older adults and their caregivers to testify by [videotape](#). They told vivid stories about how their quality of life has improved since they left nursing homes and received care at home.

Currently, Home First allows people living in nursing facilities immediate access to home and community care without delays imposed by waiting lists for these services. The legislation would extend that option to people discharged from hospitals, or older adults in abusive and self-neglect situations, as well as those who have depleted their assets in assisted living, or whose physicians have signed that they are at risk of nursing facility placement within 30 days.

OAAAA Executive Director Larke Recchie urges aging advocates to call or email members of the [House](#) and [Senate](#) committees to ask for their support. "The committee members need to hear that there is strong support for the bill in order to vote it out of committee and get it on the floor," she said.

In addition to offering consumers more choices, Home First reduces state spending on health care. The Ohio Business Roundtable reports that Ohio could save \$900 million a

year in Medicaid costs if the state were to achieve the national average on spending for home and community care versus institutional care.

In addition to the legislators who introduced these bills, 35 representatives and eight senators are co-sponsoring this bipartisan legislation. Funding for the legislation will result from a transfer of funds between already existing accounts in the budget and will not require additional money.

At a December news conference, OAAA President Duana Patton said, "Although Democrats and Republicans have not agreed on much this session, they are united in making cost-effective investments in home and community care. It's what our parents and grandparents prefer, and it's fiscally prudent in Ohio's declining economy."