

Sub. House Bill 153
Testimony, Senate Finance Committee
Suzanne Shelpman
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Chairman Widener, Ranking Member Skindell, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony. I am Suzanne Shelpman.

I give testimony to you as a caregiver of over 15 years for my mother who had Alzheimer's disease and a caregiver for my father who had a stroke. As a retiree of the state of Ohio working for education, rehabilitation, and aging, I also address you having established The Passages Group, Inc., business to continue my work for older adults with dementia who are private-pay clients, not Medicaid consumers. And I give testimony as an Ohio taxpayer and representing hundreds of my clients, their providers, and their caregivers, who are also taxpayers in our state. My concern is underfunding of the PASSPORT program.

Why would I advocate for more funding for the PASSPORT Medicaid waiver home and community based services program? Because you have a real chance, this time, in this budget process, to turn the looming tide of increasing Medicaid costs. Because you have a real chance, this time, in this budget process, to begin getting Ohio out of a Medicaid crisis by re-balancing long-term care for more older adults to remain in their communities with home and community-based services, their preference.

This is the 18th Ohio biennial budget process that I have followed in my 36 year career. I am more encouraged yet more exasperated this time.

I am encouraged with the progress made in increasing the numbers of older adults who will receive home and community-based services as their long-term care choice. I am encouraged that, finally, it appears the nursing home lobbyists cannot buy their way into legislators' pockets and votes. I am encouraged that the House restored \$15M to the PASSPORT budget for care plan services, but that is not enough. You could triple that amount restored and have an even larger cost-savings impact on Medicaid dollars by ensuring that even more frail elderly Ohioans receive appropriate services in their homes vs. a nursing home.

So why am I exasperated? You have the answer to reducing Medicaid funding right before you—the PASSPORT Medicaid waiver program. Yet, you are allowing the very entities, the Area Agencies on Aging, who administer the cost-savings PASSPORT program to incur a 15% budget cut in the current Omnibus Budget bill. This not only makes no fiscal sense—this makes NO sense.

In fact, the rationale behind the 15% cut to Area Agencies on Aging is flawed. In comparing the AAA administrative costs to managed care organizations administrative costs, a major fallacy occurred.

In the comparison, no consideration was given to the significant administrative responsibilities of AAAs that are the very core of the highly successful, fiscally prudent, and continually audited PASSPORT Medicaid waiver program.

One of the most evident differences is in-person, in-home visits by the AAA case managers that managed care organizations do not provide. It is these comprehensive contacts that provide the consumers with exactly those services that will keep them in their homes and out of nursing homes. Other examples of AAA responsibilities ignored in the flawed comparison are the comprehensive screening, face-to-face assessments, and provider procurement, management, and monitoring that AAAs are required to accomplish and managed care organizations are not. Do I understand correctly that the 15% cut will translate to the loss of the people that conduct these administrative activities, required by the Medicaid waiver?

Do I understand correctly what is happening? More older adults + more individuals choosing to remain in the community for long-term care + more older adults with acute needs transitioning from nursing facilities or hospitals? And the administrative agencies are cut 15% using non-comparable data? Not only does this not add up but rather it risks the very cost-savings that the PASSPORT program provides, that Ohioans deserve, and that I thought you were trying to achieve.

I feel sure that Dr. Bonnie Kantor-Burman or Mr. Greg Moody can attest to the, now known, erroneous comparative analysis conducted that was the basic rationale for the cut in funding. If Ohio is determined to transform Medicaid and the long-term care system so that more older adults will have access to PASSPORT, why would you cut funding for the very administrative agencies that administer the program?

It brings me to tears to think that if my parents had lived long enough to spend down their life savings to Medicaid eligibility the PASSPORT program would have been so under-funded it might not have been able to help them. It makes me angry to think that if my clients who have advanced dementia no longer have the resources to self-pay their long-term care services in their home, they would be forced to move to a nursing home due to an under-funded PASSPORT program.

The time is now. The reasons are simple. I ask that you reverse the 15% cut to the PASSPORT Medicaid waiver program in the state of Ohio for the taxpayers, for older adults, and because you are serious about the budget's fiscal solvency.

I thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns and interest.

Suzanne Shelpman, Kettering , Ohio