



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office for Aging

Jason T. Garnar, County Executive · Lisa M. Schuhle, Director

February 9, 2021

Dear Distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly standing committees,

I would like to take a moment to provide written testimony on the need for increased funding for aging services. The Area Agencies on Aging provide a myriad of programs, services and supports to individuals 60 years of age and older, their families, friends, and natural supports to achieve this mission. These include home delivered and congregate meals, case management, personal care services to assist with bathing, toileting, dressing, shopping, meal preparation, legal services, personal emergency response systems, health insurance information and counseling, respite, social adult day services, information and assistance services, nutrition education and counseling, health promotion and wellness, evidenced based interventions, home modifications, transportation, caregiver supports, benefits and application assistance and access to long term services and supports through the NY Connects no wrong door systems reforms.

The older population is the basis for a strong economy in New York State (NYS), and in the country. Older residents have a tremendous amount of capital and contribute significant income to the state. According to the 50+ Longevity Economy report, the overall contribution of the 50 plus population to the economic and unpaid activities was worth more than \$9 trillion in 2018 and will triple to \$28.2 trillion by 2050. In NYS the 60+ population is expected to grow from 4.6 million today to 5.6 million by 2040. Keeping these individuals in NYS is paramount to our economic success. Individuals over the age of 45 currently generate \$379 billion per year which represents 63% of all of the income in the state. Additionally, these individuals' volunteering and civic engagement value is over \$13 billion annually.

Nationally there are 4.1 million unpaid caregivers providing the bulk of the nation's long-term care and if paid for at the market rate are worth \$32 billion dollars per year. This data makes it abundantly clear that NYS must make it a priority to make NY a place where individuals remain as they age. The return on investment, by ensuring we provide appropriate care and support, makes sense from an economic standpoint, and our network provides that assistance. Older New Yorkers contribute to federal and state tax payments, support small businesses, and contribute enormously to the local economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted, and highlighted, the need for services and supports throughout NYS. Our network was tasked with providing services to all individuals over the age of 60, almost overnight. Our almost 800 senior centers were shut down, our social adult day

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programs suspended, and food insecurity and supply demand skyrocketed. Our network rose to this challenge, and instantly transformed traditional delivery models to meet the needs of older New Yorkers. This was done based on the dedication of our staff and subcontractors, and the need to ensure those most vulnerable were served without interruption. Following Matilda's Law, many of our volunteers, who deliver food, provide transportation, and provide friendly visiting services headed the direction of the Governor, and remained at home. This left the network with a huge deficit in workforce, and highlights the importance of the volunteer community, where the majority is over the age of 60.

Our network absorbed a 70-90% increase in demand, without additional staff to keep up with the increased demand. The network collectively worked 24-7 to provide essential services to older New Yorkers and their families based on our infrastructure and dedication. We fielded calls from concerned citizens, their family members, and facilities. Our network has borne the burden of COVID-19 on the aging population with fortitude and resilience. It is imperative that this is recognized, and that we receive the funding necessary to continue to provide the highest level of care for our population. It is crucial that state government understand and appreciate the work that is done for older residents of this state.

The network of Area Agencies on Aging (OFA's) has additionally been tasked with the burden of enrolling thousands of older residents that are desperate to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Many of the individuals we serve are not able to access the internet, don't own a computer and are unable to answer the cumbersome questions online in order to receive a vaccination appointment. Additionally, staff at the local level who are delivering meals daily to the most vulnerable individuals have not been a priority for vaccination, risking a home delivered meal route becoming a super spreader event. I cannot stress how significant our role in vaccinations has become, as every individual over 65 who doesn't have access to the internet or can't manage the online registration process, has reached out to their local AAA.

The services and supports that are provided through the Offices for the Aging and their network of almost 1,200 community partners improve overall health and save the state money by reducing the utilization of higher cost services. A typical client who is served through the aging networks coordinated array of core services and supports is a high needs individual who has a Medicaid spend-down and is at risk of nursing home placement. The typical customers who receive core services are primarily:

- women in their early 80s
- low-income
- live alone

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- have substantial functional limitations (needing assistance with personal hygiene, bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring, shopping and preparing meals, house cleaning, and transportation, doing laundry, self-administering medication and handling personal business)
- have 4 or more chronic conditions (arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis and visual impairments.).

These are all individuals who can remain independent for years with some support from their local offices for the aging.

Our network is able to serve them at a fraction of the cost of Medicaid funded services because we are able to intervene earlier, we do not require a physician's order to access services in a high-cost medical model. We are also able to provide holistic care in a person-centered way by coordinating services that we oversee and work with other systems if additional supports are needed. Further, the services we provide do not require an individual to impoverish themselves and spend all their assets, effectively diminishing their positive impact on the local and state economy. Our offices engage these four general areas:

1. Healthy and active older adults who provide a tremendous amount of service through volunteerism. Our programs could not serve nearly the level of people we do without these individuals' commitment to help others.
2. Older adults with small needs or a need for information and assistance, can learn about what benefits they are able to access, what Medicare and insurance plans are best for them, how to better manage their chronic conditions through our evidenced based program offerings, or other programming through our senior/adult centers that can help them stay active and engaged in their community.
3. At risk frail older adults who have extensive chronic conditions and functional impairments can be provided with a little support, are able to avoid Medicaid spend-down and nursing home placement via a coordinated array of supports and case management, thereby maintaining their autonomy and reducing reliance on Medicaid funded care.
4. Caregiver supports and respite. These supports assist family caregivers so that they can care for their loved ones longer in the community and avoid premature placements in facilities at much higher costs.

This engagement of healthy older adults, down to those most at risk are what the aging network in New York is all about. Clients who are served via our more intensive programs are comprehensively screened across numerous categories to identify any and all needs that they

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may have. We focus on their strengths and assets and how to leverage those strengths, as well as community partnerships to provide services in a person-centered approach, all while ensuring individuals are able to remain in the least restrictive setting while providing savings to a costly health care system. Our network is one of the few that can, and does, address the social determinants of health, preventing inappropriate utilization of skilled nursing facilities and emergency departments, and preventing clients' Medicaid spend down expenses. Social determinants of health (individual behaviors and social and environmental factors) are responsible for 60% or more of all health care expenditures, yet interventions to address them comprise only 3% of national health expenditures and with 97% of the funding getting allocated to medical services. While health care will always be important, the heavy lift to assure that care plans and post-discharge services and supports are in place are the responsibility of our network. We are a central part of the success, or failure of the health care industry and the personal success of individuals and families.

We ask that you consider the following recommendations for this year's aging budget:

- Provide \$27 million to address the reported waiting lists identified by the Area Agencies on Aging and their community-based partners
- Restore funding for the Lifespan of Greater Rochester and the NYS Coalition on Elder Abuse - \$340,000
- Increase funding for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program - \$5 million
- Invest in technology services to combat social isolation and loneliness – \$5 million

I cannot stress enough how aging service providers are providing a significant cost savings to the Medicaid system but do not receive the attention or stature that they deserve. The older adults being served via aging services have complex need and are high-risk. The Area Agencies on Aging and their partners can provide quality services and supports to older individuals and their network of caregivers, at a much lower cost than the medical model. We do all this while providing person centered approach. Investments in aging services are vitally important to the economic security of New York State, and they need to be a priority rather than an afterthought. I respectfully ask that the Legislature continue to invest in our network and incentivize the network through proactive policy and statutory changes. I thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Lisa Schuhle

Director of the Broome County Office for Aging