



AARP New York

**Testimony before the
Joint Legislative Budget Committee
Senate Finance and Assembly Ways & Means**

Human Services Budget

February 12, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Human Services portion of the Executive Budget for the SFY 2025-26. AARP is a social mission organization with 2.2 million members in the state, and we advocate on behalf of all New Yorkers age 50 and older. In our submitted testimony today, I am focusing on specific needs and priorities of this committee. However, our letter to legislative leaders, which we will share with all legislators, provides a deeper, richer analysis of what is needed for older New Yorkers outside of health and human services. Today's testimony is focused on the needs of older adults and the challenges they face, particularly in accessing services, caregiving, and long-term care.

The Growing Older Adult Population

New York's older adult population is booming. According to a new report from the Center for an Urban Future,¹ there are now 3.56 million New Yorkers age 65-plus. This is an almost 30% increase over the last decade. Nearly 1 in 5 New Yorkers (or 18%) is age 65 and over.

Concerningly, the rate of poverty among older adults is also rapidly increasing. Statewide, the number of older adults living in poverty increased by almost 50% over the last decade, while the number of people under age 65 living in poverty decreased by 22%. Almost 50% of the older adult population reported no retirement income. The number of older New Yorkers who are employed increased by 53.5% over the past decade, compared to the 2.9% increase in the number of employed New Yorkers under the age of 65 during the same period.

¹ <https://nycfuture.org/research/the-emerging-financial-security-crisis-facing-older-adults-across-new-york>

Access to Home- and Community-Based Services

AARP research consistently shows that older adults want to remain in their own homes and communities as they age.² A critical part of enabling older adults to age at home is ensuring they have access to help with activities of daily living, and that family members caring for aging loved ones have support and respite to assist in their labor of love.

Family caregivers play a key role in determining an older person's ability to remain in their home and community and out of far costlier, taxpayer-funded institutional care settings such as nursing homes for as long as possible. Home services can be a lifeline for some of the 2.2 million family caregivers statewide, a majority of whom are women and who provide an estimated 2.1 billion hours of care for an economic value of \$39 billion annually.³ It has been found that 55% of women caregivers report not having a choice to provide care and nearly 25% feel that caregiving has made their health worse, with this percentage increasing as the intensity of their caregiving work increases.⁴ These family caregivers need support to be able to keep caring for their loved ones.

The State Office for the Aging (SOFA) administers non-Medicaid programs like the Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP) and the Community Services for the Elderly (CSE) program. These programs enable middle-class older New Yorkers to remain in their homes while supporting their family caregivers by providing services such as transportation, adult day care, home-delivered meals, and respite. Unfortunately, there is a statewide waiting list for over 16,000 services, leaving thousands of individuals and their families languishing without help.

² <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/livable-communities/housing/2024-home-community-preferences/>

³ <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2023/3/valuing-state-estimates.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00082.009.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/ltss/family-caregiving/caregiving-in-the-united-states/>

Budget Request

AARP New York urges the Legislature to accept the historic Executive Budget investment of \$53 million for home- and community-based services, which will finally help to end the waiting lists for home- and community-based services and address the needs of the growing older adult population. By delaying or preventing these individuals from going into an institutional care setting, this investment can save over \$150 million to the Medicaid program.

We are incredibly appreciative of the Governor's recognition of and commitment to addressing the needs of middle-class older New Yorkers. County offices for the aging have been struggling to meet the growing demand for these services and the proposed investment will better enable them to serve their older adult population. At the same time, these offices are facing increasing costs due to inflation and cost of living adjustments, impacting their ability to provide services for the portion of the population already getting help from these programs. **We respectfully request an additional investment of \$44 million to help meet the demand for core services.**

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP)

Should an older adult require a level of care provided by a long-term care facility, they deserve to have a strong advocate working to ensure they are receiving the highest quality of care. Under the federal Older Americans Act, every state is required to operate a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) that addresses complaints and advocates for improvements in the long-term care system. The State Office for Aging houses our LTCOP in New York. The program is required to provide services to 160,000 residents in New York's 1,400 nursing homes and other adult care facilities. The program goal is to have a regular presence, defined as at least one visit per week per facility, in all facilities.

LTCOP states that this regular presence allows ombudsmen to make a connection with residents, develop trusting relationships and promote advocacy for them. Ombudsmen also foster a working relationship with facility staff, increasing the ability to resolve concerns and observe changes or patterns in the facility that may be having an impact on resident care.

LTCOP is supposed to be the voice of the frail in our institutions. It helps residents and family caregivers understand and exercise residents' rights and intervenes to help protect residents by resolving specific quality-of-care issues. Unfortunately, the current levels of funding are not sufficient for LTCOP to carry out its purpose.

According to the latest data⁵ taken from April-June 2024, 10% of facilities did not receive a visit from an ombudsman. Of those facilities visited by an ombudsman, only 18.5% received a weekly visit, which is the stated goal of the program. These weekly visits are essential to addressing resident complaints and provide oversight to safeguard against issues like abuse and neglect.

Budget Request

LTCOP needs more professional staff to conduct weekly visits, giving all facilities a regular Ombudsman presence, undoubtedly improving the care residents receive. That would require one full-time employee for every five facilities for weekly coverage. We estimate **an additional investment of \$12.5 million** will achieve this goal. With adequate funding and staff, the ombudsman program can be an effective advocate and resource for family caregivers and their loved ones who live in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other licensed adult care homes.

⁵ <https://aging.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/11/statewide-visits-by-region-quarter-3-ffy2024-.pdf>

Conclusion

The older adult population is growing while at the same time increasingly living in poverty. The 2025-26 enacted budget must address the needs of older New Yorkers by providing funding for non-Medicaid services that allow them to remain in their homes and communities while shoring up programs that advocate on behalf of residents of long-term care facilities. The Governor's Executive Budget proposal recognizes the critical need for middle-class home- and community-based services. We urge the Legislature to accept the investment in these essential programs while providing additional funding to cover rising costs. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony.