

Good morning Chair Langerholc, Chair Collett, and members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee, My name is Rebecca May-Cole, Executive Director of the PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging, also known as P4A.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to talk about the realities of Pennsylvania's Protective Services system.

Recent Spotlight articles may have left the public with the impression of a system that is **complacent, careless, or indifferent**, when in fact what exists is a network of people working under enormous strain to keep older Pennsylvanians both safe and respected.

On behalf of the Pennsylvania's local, community oriented AAAs, I'm grateful to share context, facts, and a grounded view of the realities AAAs face every single day.

I also want to thank you for passing **Act 61 of 2024**, the *Guardianship Reform Act*, and **Act 39 of 2025**, which ensures timely court review of guardianship petitions, you have reaffirmed that older adults deserve both **protection and self-determination** — the same principles that guide everything our AAA network does.

P4A, the Area Agencies on Aging, and Interaction with PDA

For context, **P4A represents Pennsylvania's 52 Area Agencies on Aging**, which serve roughly **548,000 older adults each year**. These agencies form the on-the-ground network that turns public policy into real-world support — helping older adults live safely and independently at home, and ensuring that families, caregivers, and communities have the resources to sustain them.

The AAAs are local, community-based organizations — serving all 67 counties — and operate under the oversight of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. The Department sets statewide standards and accountability in accordance with the Older Americans Act and state law, while the AAAs deliver the hands-on services that make those standards meaningful.

The work of the AAAs remains extraordinarily demanding. The population of older Pennsylvanians continues to grow — **3.4 million today, projected to rise nearly 40% by 2030** — yet funding and staffing have not kept pace.

Protective Services and the Right to Self-Determination

At the center of this system is **Protective Services**, which exists to detect and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, or abandonment of older adults.

This work is difficult, emotional, and often misunderstood. Protective Services staff routinely enter unsafe or uncertain situations — sometimes late at night, often without backup — because an older adult may be in danger. They do this out of commitment, not authority. Their job is to **protect rights, not override them**.

In Pennsylvania law, adults over 60 retain the right to make their own decisions, even decisions others might not agree with. A physician may offer an opinion about capacity, but **only a judge** can make the legal determination that a person cannot make decisions for themselves.

AAAs must, by law, explore every least restrictive alternative before considering any step that could diminish an older adult's independence. That principle matters. In domestic violence situations, for example, we recognize that victims have the right to determine when and how to accept help. The same rights apply to older adults — autonomy and protection must exist side by side. Are there times when a person lacks the capacity to make decisions for themselves? Yes. But we should not and must not assume that just because of your age, you are incapable of self determination. This is incredibly complex and sensitive work and substantially different from child protective services

The suggestion that protective services investigators or AAAs are indifferent to older adults' safety is simply false. The truth is that Protective Services must balance **two sacred duties**: keeping people safe and preserving their dignity. Every report of need is reviewed for imminent risk. But not every case ends with forced intervention — because our system, by design, values self-determination.

The Budget Impasse and the Impact of Insufficient Funding

While the philosophical debates play out in headlines, the immediate crisis is financial. We sincerely appreciate the additional \$10 million allocated in last week's budget. We understand the difficult decisions that had to be made in order to find compromise and pass a final budget. We still want to reiterate the long term impact of continued underfunding of Pennsylvania's Area Agencies on Aging. The human cost is mounting. AAAs have been cutting back on services to older Pennsylvanians for more than a decade.

AAAs are built on prevention – stopping smaller problems before they become crises. When preventive programs stall or disappear, more costly emergency interventions, like protective services, inevitably follow. AAAs are stretching every dollar through delayed

hiring, creative partnerships, and reducing services. So called “efficiencies” can’t replace stable funding that recognizes both inflation and our rapidly growing older adult population.

The **state budget impasse** left AAAs in untenable positions — serving older Pennsylvanians facing hardship without the funding stability they need to keep operations running. While the budget did pass, it is important for committee members to be aware of the impact of delays in funding on your older constituents.

Our **Fall 2025 survey** of Area Agencies on Aging found that:

- **90%** of AAAs are facing budget shortfalls.
- **45%** are relying on reserves to stay open.
- **30%** have turned to county government assistance, totaling nearly **\$4.9 million** since July.
- **11 AAAs** have furloughed or will have to furlough staff.
- **33 AAAs** have taken other measures such as hiring freezes, stopping nonessential services, or negotiating delayed payments to vendors.

The human cost is visible:

- **At least 1,449 consumers** are on waiting lists.
- **542 older adults** have seen reduced in-home meal deliveries.
- **319** have lost services entirely.

Closing and Gratitude

In closing, I want to return to where I began: gratitude.

To this Committee — **Chairs Langerholc and Collett**, and all the members — thank you for giving attention to these issues, and for recognizing that the wellbeing of older Pennsylvanians is not a partisan concern. It is a shared moral responsibility.

Our aging network is not perfect, but it is filled with people who show up every day to do difficult work with compassion and professionalism. They deserve fair scrutiny, but also fair support.

We ask this Committee to continue standing with them — ensuring the system has the resources and respect it needs to protect both the **safety** and the **rights** of every older Pennsylvanian.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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