

**Senate Aging and Youth Committee
Pennsylvania Department of Aging**

**Written Testimony of
Secretary Jason Kavulich
November 18, 2025**

Introduction

Chairman Langerholc, Chairwoman Collett, and members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance and impact of the work of the Department of Aging (Department) in its oversight of the 52 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) spanning all 67 counties of the Commonwealth.

Older Pennsylvanians bring value, depth of knowledge, and experience to our lives, our communities, and our Commonwealth. To support the needs of older adults as they age, the Department and the AAAs work to administer a network of services and supports for older Pennsylvanians throughout every aspect of their daily lives. One of the Department's most critical responsibilities is to administer the provisions of the Older Adults Protective Services Act across Pennsylvania. This involves monitoring the work performed by the AAAs in carrying out their protective services duties- which include taking reports of need, conducting investigations, substantiating cases, and, when deemed necessary, providing protective services to older adults. As our state's older adult population continues to grow, and the complexity of cases increases, so does the need to enhance the practice of older adult protective services. These trends underscore the urgency of modernizing oversight tools and ensuring all AAAs consistently meet the highest standards of safety and service delivery. In 2023-2024, the Department received more than 58,000 reports of suspected abuse or neglect, almost double the number of reports received in 2017-2018.

Comprehensive Aging Performance Evaluation Process

Beginning in 2023, the Department completed the first major overhaul and upgrade of the Department's monitoring system in decades. This new system eliminates inconsistencies, personal bias, and subjective scoring. Our new system,

known as the Comprehensive Agency Performance Evaluation, or CAPE, is reflected in sound principles and legal authority, and is based on scientific methodology that includes verifiable facts and data. The new monitoring system is a key component of the Department's commitment to continuous quality improvement of services delivered by the AAAs at the local level. It is also a key element of the Department's work toward greater public transparency, while continuing to protect the dignity, autonomy, and privacy of the older adults that we serve.

The Department developed the CAPE process utilizing a comprehensive and objective methodology, rooted in Federal and State statutory, regulatory, and administrative policy. Every metric within CAPE is tied to a specific legal or administrative requirement, ensuring clarity, fairness, and consistency statewide. This includes the following:

1. The Older Americans Act,
2. Older Adults Protective Services Act (OAPSA, 35 P.S. §§ 10225.101, *et seq.*),
3. Older Adults Protective Services Regulations (6 Pa. Code Chapter 15 regulations)
4. Aging Services Policy and Procedures Manual
 - Chapter IV. OPTIONS Program
 - Chapter VI Caregiver Support Program
 - Chapter VII Protective Services
5. Aging Program Directives
 - Fiscal APD 05-01-09
 - Fiscal APD 24-01-01
6. Cooperative Block Grant Agreement

In building this comprehensive monitoring tool, the Department moved away from evaluating AAAs on a legacy "pass/fail system" that left little room for performance improvement. Now, CAPE ensures AAAs undergo more robust, consistent, in-depth evaluations that accurately identify and correct deficiencies.

CAPE evaluates AAAs' Protective Services and their OPTIONS/Caregiver Support Program. CAPE results are compiled into category scores, including the following:

- Older Adult Protective Services
 - documentation requirements
 - data management
 - administrative oversight
 - risk mitigation and safety
 - investigative activities
- OPTIONS, which provides help with tasks of daily living, and the Caregiver Support Program
 - documentation requirements
 - data management
 - administrative oversight
 - care management
 - program eligibility
 - policy and fiscal operations

The legacy system simply labeled each AAA as “compliant” or “noncompliant” based on arbitrarily weighted categories. However, CAPE **requires** each and every metric to meet a certain threshold. If that threshold is not met in any one area, the Department considers that AAA to be deficient and performance improvement plans are required.

CAPE’s performance improvement plans require direct action by an AAA to correct any metric that does not meet the Department’s standard. This means that CAPE produces more robust, comprehensive, meaningful performance improvement plans than under the old system. And most importantly, CAPE will lead to more substantive improvements in care for older adults.

Under the new system, the Department will continue to review AAA data and performance monthly. In addition, each AAA will be comprehensively monitored on a consistent schedule, with regular communications in-between monitoring to discuss the outcomes, ensure that they are taking steps toward any needed performance improvement, and provide additional training and technical assistance as needed.

Accountability

Each CAPE category – which is publicly posted on PDA’s website – details the AAA’s performance and will also trigger additional technical assistance from the Department if needed. For the first time, the Department’s cooperative agreement with the AAAs spells out clear consequences if performance doesn’t improve. Some of these consequences include, initiating a performance improvement plan, notifying an AAA’s board of directors about the AAA’s failure to improve, temporarily withholding payments to the AAA, and initiating suspension or withdrawal proceedings of the AAA’s designation.

Protecting older adults is my top priority as Secretary, and we are making real progress. For example, thanks to the Department’s increased efforts with AAAs, the Delaware County AAA more than doubled its compliance rate for timely determinations in older adult protective services – from 40% in 2024 to 89% in 2025 – and the Westmoreland County AAA more than tripled its compliance rate.

That means older adults in these counties are receiving the assistance and care they need faster and more efficiently than before.

AAA protective services professionals perform some of the toughest social services work there is, but when that performance isn’t up to the standards outlined in law and regulation, we need an objective, consistent, constructive system based on facts and evidence to identify deficiencies and help AAAs improve – with clear consequences if they don’t.

Transparency

Transparency has been a priority for the Department since I became Secretary, which is why for the first time ever, information is available to the public on the services and monitoring results of the Area Agencies on Aging. Individuals can now go on our website and see:

- AAA Face-To-Face Visit Performance
- AAA Protective Services Determination Performance
- AAA Programs and Services Snapshot
- Comprehensive Aging Performance Evaluations (CAPE)

Few – if any – other states are now providing as much transparency related to the performance of their AAAs as Pennsylvania.

As part of our ongoing commitment to transparency, the Department also invites members of the General Assembly to a CAPE monitoring briefing for every AAA located in their district. This provides the opportunity for members to receive an overview of the monitoring results and have the ability to ask questions. To date, the Department has completed 14 briefings.

Rights of Older Adults

I would be remiss if I didn't highlight that the rights of older adults must be in the forefront of everything the Department and AAAs do when addressing an older adult's individual needs. Age does not strip a person of their right to autonomy, dignity and self-determination. Older adults who have capacity have the right to make their own decision to refuse or accept services and supports. Only if the older adult accepts assistance can a AAA move forward with putting those services in place, whether that's meals, caregiving, or protective services. These human rights are protected by both federal and state law and must be honored and respected by the Department and the AAA even if we do not agree with the decision.

These protections guide every action taken by the Department and ensure that interventions remain person-centered, respectful, and legally sound.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share information about the Department's oversight of the AAAs, and the older Pennsylvanians we serve. We look forward to working closely with the Committee to strengthen quality, safety, and accountability in aging services across the Commonwealth.