

**House Appropriations Committee
Pennsylvania Department of Aging**

**Written Testimony of
Acting Secretary Jason Kavulich
March 27, 2023**

Introduction

Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, and members of the House Appropriations Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of Governor Shapiro's proposed Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget for the Department of Aging (Department) and the older Pennsylvanians we serve. Both the Department and the Administration's commitment are reflected in the proposed budget through the increased investments. We are requesting additional lottery funding for services and support to help older adults, many of whom live on fixed incomes, stay in their homes and communities as they age with the dignity and respect they deserve, and to equip and strengthen the Area Agency on Aging Network as we prepare to serve the rapidly growing older adult population in Pennsylvania.

First, I would like to offer you a fresh perspective on the Department of Aging beyond what you may know from when we have partnered with you on senior fairs or helped your constituents afford life-saving prescriptions through the PACE/PACENET programs. The Department of Aging supports older adults in Pennsylvania through every aspect of daily living. From nutritious meals to transportation to housing, we assist the commonwealth's veterans, provide services at home through the OPTIONS Program, support caregivers, help Pennsylvanians find the best Medicare plan and provide information and referrals through the PA Link. The Department and AAA Network are present through all of these pertinent issues -- if an issue impacts Pennsylvanians, it involves our Department and the AAA network. A great example of this is our work with the Department of Banking and Securities on the issue of preventing the financial exploitation of older adults. We recognize the importance of these partnerships and will continue to coordinate and collaborate with all of our state agencies, building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones, because only together can we make real progress for Pennsylvania's older adults.

Older Pennsylvanians bring value, depth of knowledge, and experience to our lives, our communities, and our commonwealth. Now, it is our turn to highlight the Department's value in how we serve and support the older adults of our commonwealth.

Department of Aging Goals – State Master Plan on Aging

The Department of Aging's commitment to the older adults we serve can be seen through our ongoing development and creation of a State Master Plan on Aging. The State Master Plan on Aging is a multi-faceted, multi-sector plan that will serve as a road map for Pennsylvania for the next 10 years to prepare and guide us through the unprecedented rise in our aging population. This will be a plan for Pennsylvania, created by Pennsylvanians, because aging with dignity, safety and quality of life is a right and a concern for all Pennsylvanians in all phases and walks of life. We intend to give a voice to older Pennsylvanians in the creation of the plan, so the Department will convene stakeholders, and work to

foster partnerships and interdepartmental connections to create a more supportive Pennsylvania that will assist older adults to age in place in the homes and communities they love.

Governor's Budget Proposal

The Department appreciates Governor Shapiro's recognition of the needs of Pennsylvania's older adults, and we stand ready to amplify our support to them with the additional funding in the proposed 2023-2024 Budget. I want to take some time to highlight a few specific elements and how they will benefit older adults throughout the commonwealth.

Investing in Older Pennsylvanians

Governor Shapiro has proposed \$10 million for the AAA network and \$1 million for senior center grants. This investment in older Pennsylvanians comes at a critical time, as the aging population continues to grow but the AAA network has not seen a substantive increase in years. These additional resources, disbursed throughout the state to the 52 Area Agencies on Aging, will help us meet the growing service demand. Specifically, it will help to support older Pennsylvanians by reducing the wait list for the services included in the Department's OPTIONS Program, increasing support for Senior Community Centers, and assisting adults in staying in their homes. It also provides additional funding to the AAA network to attract providers and recruit and retain staff, which we all know is critical to service delivery. These programs include adult day services, in-home meals, and personal care services to assist older adults with valuable aspects of everyday living.

Helping Seniors Stay in Their Homes

The Governor has called for increased funding of the Property Tax Rent Rebate Program through the expansion of the income eligibility and an increase to the maximum rebate amount. This is a critical change, as income limits have remained the same since 2006, and older adults are experiencing tight budgets and inflation, threatening to push them out of their homes. Specifically, the Governor's proposal calls for:

- Increasing the rebate caps to a maximum of \$1,000 (from \$650)
- Increasing the income cap for homeowners and renters to \$45,000 (up from \$35,000 and \$15,000, respectively)
- Increasing the income cap to grow with inflation according to consumer price index (CPI) growth beginning with the claim year 2024

Working with the Department of Revenue to expand the income eligibility and increase the rebate amount would benefit over half a million (570,000) elderly and disabled Pennsylvanians, assisting them in staying in their homes and allowing them to age in place in their communities where they want to be.

Feeding Older Pennsylvanians

Another way we can all support older adults in our communities is through Governor Shapiro's proposed increase in the minimum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit. Eligible older adults would receive an increase from the current minimum benefit of \$23 to \$35 per month – nearly a 50% increase. With the SNAP Emergency Allotments ending in February of 2023, coupled with the rising cost of inflation at the grocery stores, this increase is critical to ensuring that older adults in this

commonwealth do not go hungry. No one in this country should go to bed hungry. For those older adults struggling to afford their homes and the rising grocery bills due to inflation, every little bit helps. Food security and good nutrition for older adults is a priority for my department and can be seen through our partnership with the Department of Agriculture to promote the Senior Food Box Program, as well as our ongoing coordination with the Department of Human Services on supporting older adults receiving SNAP throughout the ending of the Public Health Emergency and into the future. This proposal would supplement our ongoing work to increase participation in feeding programs and improve the health of older adults.

Thank you

We appreciate your support and dedication to Pennsylvania's over 3.4 million older adults and the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget. This will support and enhance services for older Pennsylvanians in your district and across the Commonwealth.