

Testimony before the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging
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Senator Braun, Chairman Casey, and Members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging:

I am Laura Holscher. For 30 years it has been my honor to serve older adults at Generations Area Agency on Aging. Generations is a program of Vincennes University and is designated by the Indiana Division of Aging's Commission on Aging as the Area 13 Agency on Aging and as the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). I want to thank Senator Braun for inviting me.

Under the Older Americans Act (OAA), Generations' role is to develop, fund and implement a broad range of programs and services to meet the needs of older adults and caregivers. We serve six counties in southwestern Indiana: Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Knox, Martin and Pike counties. We impacted the lives of more than 35,000 individuals last year. Our entire planning and service area is considered rural. We have four hospitals, but in some of our cities, there is not even one primary care physician. 22.7% of the population in our service area is living below 150% of the federal poverty level.

Some of the challenges we face as a rural community include lack of broadband internet and limited access to transportation, both of which limit access to healthcare and social opportunities.

Under Title III B of the Act, our AAA offers in-home services for frail older adults, senior transportation, information and referral/assistance, options counseling, home modification and repair, legal services, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program and other person-centered approaches. The flexibility of this funding stream gives AAAs means to meet the needs of older adults in the community, eliminating the need for more expensive nursing home care.

Our OAA clients inform our work. Since many have cognitive impairments, we pulled together a dedicated action team to help form partnerships like the one with Mi Patio, a local restaurant, to provide dementia friendly dining hours. This was achieved by using some of our Title III B funding and supplementing it through our University of Southern Indiana (USI) Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP) workforce development grant. I am proud to say this county was recently designated as a Dementia Friendly Community by Dementia Friendly America.

Another essential part of OAA is Title III C Nutrition Services. In the past, Generations had provided daily hot home delivered meals to homebound older adults. As the economy shifted, gas prices rose and the cost of food increased, it became apparent that our operations would need to shift from daily hot home delivered meals to frozen meals.

As we made the shift to frozen meal providers, we searched locally for partners who would be willing to contract with us to continue to provide hot meals. We now have partnerships with a nursing home and two senior centers to provide hot meals in their surrounding area. Today we operate a hybrid program: a client can choose from up to six different frozen home-delivered service providers, or from a hot meal provider if they live in a covered area. Last year, we provided over 106,000 meals to nearly 1,000 older adults.

Our hope was to expand these local partnerships for hot meal delivery, but the funding isn't sufficient. Need is growing in our community: over the past two years, we have seen a 20% increase in calls for meals and have more people accessing our services because they just can't afford groceries or other necessities. Due to the continued rising cost of food, freight, delivery, and labor cost, the same amount of money simply cannot stretch to meet higher costs.

In addition, donations, grant support, and community support are down as donors themselves are tightening up their purse strings and prioritizing their own budgets. This has

forced us to triage calls and provide meals only to the most at-risk individuals and put others on a waiting list.

In the meantime, our trained counselors work with callers to provide alternatives, such as enrollment assistance for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, benefits and referrals to food banks, food pantries, and local churches.

Under OAA Title III D, we run several evidence-based health and wellness programs such as A Matter of Balance, Bingocize, and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. Through additional partnerships we have more than doubled in what were able to offer. There are also ways to make these dollars go further. Generations and other rural AAAs around the country would benefit from new flexibility to use Title III D monies to fund evidence-*informed* programs, which are lower in cost and more adaptable.

Generations was created as a result of the Older Americans Act. These are just a few examples of how we innovate and adapt to meet the needs of older adults in our rural area. Please keep the Act's inherent flexibility and locally driven structure in mind as you update the law this year.

I have four recommendations for the reauthorization.

1. Increase OAA funding, which has not kept pace with the growing number of older adults or inflation.
2. Continue some of the nutrition flexibilities that were extended to AAAs during COVID. Or allow for the flexibility to fund innovative ideas in the nutrition program.
3. Allow Title III D health and wellness programs to be evidence-informed.
4. We also support USAging's recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.