

Department of Human Services Budget– SB 5526

AARP Oregon Testimony

February 23, 2017

TO: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Senator Steiner-Hayward, Representative Rayfield, Co-Chairs

FROM: Jon Bartholomew, Government Relations Director, AARP Oregon

AARP Oregon is pleased to provide our support for the Department of Human Services (DHS) budget for the 2017-19 biennium with some suggestions for the Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) division. I would like to note that AARP has a very positive working relationship with DHS APD staff on many issues, ranging from conversations about expanding access to caregiver respite to ways to improve quality of care in long term care settings. DHS APD staff have been very collaborative with us as stakeholders.

As Ways and Means committee members look to craft a budget for the state, we understand the difficult decisions that are being considered. We strongly urge you to consider finding new revenue as necessary to prevent cuts to services that seniors and people with disabilities rely on to live in their own homes longer, to receive quality care, and to avoid abuse and neglect.

Some specific examples of programs that AARP is concerned could receive cuts in the 2017-19 budget are as follows:

- **Oregon Project Independence (OPI)** – this program helps many Oregonians stay in their own homes longer and helps them avoid relying on Medicaid services. In addition, the OPI helps family caregivers get respite from the hard work of caregiving. This is a low-cost, high dividend program that saves the state significant spending on Medicaid long term care. However, it was significantly cut in the Governor’s Recommended Budget (GRB), even though it has proven to be an effective program. We urge you to fund OPI at current service level, although that is still insufficient to meet the demand for the program. Many Area Agencies on Aging report having a waiting list for OPI services and that they run out of OPI funds before the year is over.
- **Reimbursement rates** – we support a full rebasing of skilled nursing facility rates and 5% annual increase in home and community based care reimbursement rates to account for increasing labor costs.

- **Oregon Care Partners** – OCP provides training for family caregivers and professional caregivers, especially for those who care for people with dementia. This is improving the quality of care in long term care settings and also helping to keep families together at home, while reducing caregiver stress. We support current service level funding for OCP.

In addition to protecting the above programs from cuts, we urge you to reconsider a cut that was made in 2015. The Gatekeeper program provides training to individuals, businesses and organizations who come into contact with vulnerable individuals in how to recognize warning signs and make referrals for help. This program offers a ‘first line of defense’ against situations that are potentially harmful but preventable including abuse and neglect. Research into the outcomes of the Gatekeeper program has shown significant improvements for individuals served including lowering of social isolation, decrease in depression symptoms, and a decrease in suicide ideation. It is community prevention and intervention at work.

In the one year that the Gatekeeper program was operating statewide (July 2014 to July 2015), over 300 businesses and organizations and over 1,100 individuals became Gatekeepers. Over 500 Gatekeeper calls were received by ADRCs including over 100 calls that required follow up by Adult Protective Services due to possible abuse or neglect. To restore this program to a statewide effort, it would require funding of \$1.7 million per biennium.

If Oregon was not faced with a considerable shortfall this year, we would have multiple other suggestions for wise investments in services to help seniors age in place, care for each other, and ensure quality care in all settings. However, we are realistic regarding the budget climate, therefore are not calling for other investments at this time. As more information is gleaned on efforts to raise revenues or reduce other costs, we will be happy to revisit this budget discussion with you.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the DHS budget.