

Testimony HB 2908 A: Oregon Project Independence

May 7, 2019

Senate Committee on Human Services

Submitted by John Mullin on behalf of Oregon AARP

Jmullinhce@gmail.com 971-276-0610

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With 510,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment. An important aspect of our advocacy is protecting and enhancing long term services and supports, consistent with the values of independence, dignity, and choice.

One of the issues for Oregon AARP this session is to preserve and enhance Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) for the elderly and people with disabilities. With this perspective in mind, AARP is pleased to support HB 2908 A, which will study the issue of providing statewide Oregon Project Independence (OPI), including eligibility for younger people with disabilities.

In addition to providing the recommendation of AARP, I would like to offer a personal perspective. I was involved in the late 1970s in running the OPI program under a contract with Clackamas County. I have seen the benefits of providing relatively small amounts of care at the right time. As initially conceived, OPI was set up to serve people 60 years of age and older, in order to prevent "premature institutionalization." With the creation of the (then) Senior Services Division, and the work on waivers to serve Medicaid clients in community based settings, the early 1980s provided a parallel but coordinated system of in home services for those on Medicaid and those elderly who had LTSS needs but were not receiving Medicaid services. While Medicaid is an entitlement and funded accordingly based on eligibility, OPI is limited by the total General Fund appropriation.

We coordinated these programs successfully when we created the Clackamas County Social Services Division, bringing multiple programs, services, and organizations together to provide a comprehensive focus on the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. However, OPI only served those over 60,

along with a limited and restricted program serving younger people with Alzheimer's and related dementia. In 2005 OPI was expanded to include younger adults with disabilities, but it was not funded. I was still director of Clackamas County Social Services and advocated for an "age neutral" OPI program. The problem, however, was that the funding was not increased, so this new service category never got off the ground until 2014.

In 2014, when I was working for the Oregon Law Center, we, along with many others, successfully advocated for the funding to add younger adults with disabilities to OPI. I supported this effort, and served on the steering committee in the creation of the pilot projects and the implementation of this important step.

I believe there is much to learn from the pilot projects, and a study would be an effective way to look at the challenges and successes of this program enhancement. Specifically, assessing how to get to statewide coverage is an important development.

In conclusion, I would just add that HB 2908 A would give legislators a better perspective on the potential benefits of expanding the pilots state wide, and to assess the benefits of ensuring statewide coverage for older people and people with disabilities younger than 60 years of age.

Thank you for your consideration