



**Joint Committee on Ways & Means: Subcommittee on Human Services
Testimony on SB 5592
Submitted by Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations, AARP Oregon
April 13, 2021**

On behalf of the Campaign for Oregon's Seniors & People with Disabilities ("the Campaign"), I am pleased to submit this testimony on SB 5529. The Campaign is a coalition of organizations including consumers, labor, business and other concerned Oregonians advocating for the independence, dignity, choice and safety of older adults and people with disabilities. **We come together to convey our shared vision of Oregon and to make recommendations on transformative investments in long-term care to ensure a healthy future in Oregon as seniors are among the fastest growing demographic in the state.**

Now is the time to support programs and services for the most vulnerable in the wake of the pandemic. COVID-19 continues to affect older adults and those living in congregate care settings particularly hard. Even in a state like Oregon that did much better than the national average in its response to the virus, over 50% of those who have perished from COVID 19 are 80 years and older and more than 90% are 60 years and older.

This session we have a unique opportunity to make investments that both foster resilience post pandemic and help prepare long-term care for significant increases in senior populations in the years to come, particularly in rural and low-income areas in Oregon.

Paid Caregivers & Workforce Development

We support investments in the workers who serve seniors and people with disabilities. Oregon's long-term care system employs nearly 55,000 direct caregivers. As the population ages, the demand for skilled caregivers grows. **We believe workforce investments in the 2021-23 biennium will be a bellwether for Oregon's ability to provide quality care for decades to come.**

- **Establish the Oregon Essential Worker Healthcare Trust:** This was funded through the Governor's Recommended Budget and creates a new option for more affordable health insurance for skilled caregivers. (SB 800)
- **Current Funding for Oregon Care Partners:** OCP provides critical training that improves quality of care. (\$3.5 million)
- **Living Wage for Caregivers:** Ensuring caregivers earn a living wage reduces turnover and plays a role in the quality of outcome for residents. We must take care of those who care

for our loved ones by advancing access to benefits and aligning wages with the quality of care provided.

Long-term Care Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

The impact of COVID-19 in combination with the rising costs of care make it more essential than ever to support access to quality long-term care services for low-income seniors and people with disabilities and support better outcomes for the workforce. **We support providing cost-of-living adjustments for Medicaid reimbursement rates for long-term care communities.**

- **5% Cost of Living Adjustment:** This 5% COLA should be for home and community-based providers, including assisted living, residential care and in-home care agencies for *both years of the biennium*.
- **Rebasing nursing facility rates:** We urge full rebasing of nursing facility rates at the 62nd percentile per Oregon law.
- **Increase reimbursement rates for adult foster care homes:** This is another important step in protecting seniors.
- **Extend the Temporary 5% COVID-19 Medicaid rates:** We urge extending what is now a temporary add-on to Medicaid rates until the end of the public health crisis. The E-Board approved this rate enhancement in January and it will expire at the end of June. Based on where we stand today the sector will continue to need support for the pandemic well past June.

Behavioral Health & Prevention

The Campaign supports strategic investments in behavior health and prevention. Behavioral health is critical to having an effective continuum of care and funding will ensure that Oregonians struggling with behavioral health problems do not slip through the cracks.

- **Safeguard current staffing levels for behavioral specialists in the Oregon Health Authority.**
- **Invest in supportive housing with wrap-around community service systems to help break the cycle of housing insecurity for vulnerable Oregonians.**
- **Fund 6 FTE in the guardian office of the Long-term Care Ombudsman for added supports and accountability for senior care.**

Leverage Federal Funds for the Future

We support utilizing new, one-time and recurring investments from the federal government to improve care, increase support for workers and help providers weather the pandemic.

- **Invest in Long-term Support Systems:** Federal Medicaid dollars flow to Oregon because of long-term care. Due to COVID-19 emergency funding, *every \$1 Oregon spends on LTCSS, the federal government kicks in 70 cents*. Investing in LTSS this session will stretch the state's dollar more than ever.

We appreciate the opportunity and urge this Committee to recommend robust funding for our seniors and people with disabilities.