

**2020 House Appropriations Committee Budget Hearing  
February 18, 2020  
Testimony of Secretary Robert Torres  
Pennsylvania Department of Aging  
State Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget**

Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford, and members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present Governor Wolf's proposed Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget for the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

I am pleased to report that we have completed a busy and exciting year focused on strengthening accountability, improving collaboration, and taking action on behalf of older adults in Pennsylvania. The Department of Aging and our many partners have accomplished a lot on behalf of older Pennsylvanians, and we have even more to do in the upcoming fiscal year.

Protecting older adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation is always our most urgent responsibility, and the department has worked hard to strengthen its protective services (PS) function. We have increased the number of available trainings for PS staff, which allows for smaller class sizes with notably more participation and improved knowledge assessments. With the additional PS funding that was allocated last fiscal year, the majority of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) hired PS supervisors, investigators, and support staff. The department enhanced its monitoring of PS by providing automated custom reports to all AAAs of cases that need to be completed that day or week. We continue to work with and support the AAA network to ensure PS cases are handled timely, accurately, and efficiently.

Our Grandfamilies Workgroup focused on the issues faced by grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of the opioid crisis. This workgroup was formed to help address some of the challenges and barriers these special families face in the health, human services, education, and legal systems. We were proud to help raise awareness and engage others to improve support on these issues. In the coming months, we hope to work together with the General Assembly to expand the Pennsylvania Caregiver Support Program that provides eligible primary caregivers with a break from caregiving and reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs associated with caregiving-related services and supplies.

The department has been helping to carry out the goals of Governor Wolf's Executive Order on Vulnerable Populations by collaborating with other state agencies and the AAAs to update our online Mandatory Abuse Reporting Training. This program will track exactly who takes the training, allowing for better verification of compliance during licensing visits. We are also completing a financial exploitation analysis to assess the impact financial exploitation of older adults is having within the commonwealth.

Our PACE/PACENET Programs continue to earn their reputation as some of the most effective, efficient programs in the commonwealth, providing prescription assistance to qualified low-income individuals, conducting education and outreach to help eligible older adults connect to other benefits, and helping to curb inappropriate drug use. Since Act 87 of 2018 raised

PACENET income limits by \$4,000, 19,200 new enrollees have come into the program as of October 2019.

The PA Link Aging and Disability Resource Centers serve as an information and referral network that annually helps close to 21,000 people, over the age of 60 and individuals with disabilities, with long-term services and supports. The network consists of private and public partner agencies and organizations that provide objective information, advice, and personalized assistance to empower individuals to make informed decisions about long-term services and supports while maintaining independence and aging in place. Partner agencies are the pillars of this network and increasing the number of partners in the network is one of our goals. Last fiscal year, the PA Link network added to its base approximately 500 new partners totaling slightly over 3,700 network partners. In addition to information and referral activities, partners provided person-centered one-on-one counseling to over 3,600 individuals and family members with long-term support service options.

We look to build on the achievements and momentum of 2019 as we look ahead to the new fiscal year. Passage this year of much-needed updates to the Older Adults Protective Services Act (OAPSA) is critical to our ability to provide the best quality services and assure the safety of older adults. Our priority areas include expanding mandatory reporters, updating background checks and voluntary and mandatory reporter training requirements, and providing a process on how to report suspected abuse. We are optimistic and look forward to the support of the General Assembly on updating OAPSA to help us provide necessary and meaningful protections that serve in the best interest of older adults.

Our OPTIONS program enables older adults to age in place and receive care and support in their homes. This program is helpful to individuals who need assistance with activities of daily living, but do not qualify for Medicaid funded long-term services and supports. An individual's OPTIONS care plan could include services such as in-home meals, personal care services, home modifications, or other supportive services. Governor Wolf is proposing an increase of \$8.1 million to help the AAA network provide valuable services to approximately 1,700 older Pennsylvanians who are on the waiting list for needed services.

A major department focus is addressing Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. More than 400,000 Pennsylvanians are living with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder, and that number is expected to increase by more than 14 percent by 2025. With support from Pennsylvania's Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Task Force, other state agencies, and stakeholders, we are working to respond to the anticipated increase in Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. We are expanding our efforts to create a dementia-friendly Pennsylvania by collaborating with national and statewide partners to support training, build awareness, and promote action among community stakeholders.

We are building on our commitment to foster a Pennsylvania that is age friendly and responsive to an increasingly diverse older adult population. This includes supporting LGBTQ older adults by working to address issues raised at the 2018 LGBTQ Aging Summit. We have built partnerships with advocacy organizations to improve our outreach efforts, and provided SAGECare (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) Cultural Competency training for

department employees, positioning the department to become the first SAGECare-certified Department of Aging in the country. We are also working with the National Federation of the Blind's Newsline to create a dedicated channel with news, events, and information from all department programs and services. Newsline is a free service for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or otherwise unable to access printed materials. The department will be the first state agency in the nation to partner with Newsline.

The department continues to collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies to develop and implement housing pilot projects to expand affordable, accessible housing options for older adults throughout the commonwealth. Our Shared Housing and Resource Exchange (SHARE) and Elder Cottage Housing Opportunity (ECHO) pilots provide additional housing options for older adults who wish to remain in their homes and communities. We look to expand SHARE and ECHO projects with interested AAAs to address the growing concern of affordable housing for seniors.

Pennsylvania has been well served since the creation of the lottery and the General Assembly's dedicated commitment to support older adults with valuable programs and services that touch lives every day. As the department responsible for supporting and advocating for older adults, we urge that Pennsylvania's Lottery funding be protected to prevent it from being compromised by the current threat of illegal gaming. These illegal games pose a clear and present danger to the commonwealth's ability to meet the needs of our growing aging population.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Wolf's proposed Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Budget for the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. I look forward to working with the General Assembly to ensure Pennsylvania's older adults receive the services they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives.