

**2019 House Appropriations Committee
Budget Hearing
February 11, 2019**

**Testimony of Acting Secretary Robert Torres
Pennsylvania Department of Aging
Fiscal Year 2019-2020 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 2019-2020 Budget for the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

Joining me today is Tom Snedden, director of the department's Bureau of the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly, or PACE.

I am pleased to be with you today to highlight the Department of Aging's mission of enhancing the quality of life of older Pennsylvanians by empowering diverse communities, the family and the individual. The department is built on a foundation of prevention and protection: to prevent instability of health and wellness by enabling older Pennsylvanians to age in place with dignity and to protect the most vulnerable from abuse, neglect, abandonment, and exploitation. Older Pennsylvanians deserve nothing less than our full effort to achieve this mission and fulfill Governor Wolf's vision of a government that works.

The department works with Pennsylvania's network of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and other key partners to achieve our goals of promoting existing services, improving access to services, enhancing quality of services, and empowering the workforce. The department could not meet the critical needs of our most vulnerable seniors without the support of our partners and Pennsylvania's Lottery Fund. Thanks to the leadership and hard work of Governor Wolf and the General Assembly creating an influx of new gaming options tailored to the next generation of lottery players, the Lottery Fund is stable and thriving; allowing us to serve more seniors.

Over the past year, the department has advanced several initiatives to meet its goals. Through the passage of Act 87 of 2018, the PACE program was able to expand income eligibility for the PACE Needs Enhancement Tier, or PACENET for the first time since 2003. This expansion impacted a total of 17,059 individuals; allowing 12,574 individuals to become enrolled in PACENET and preventing 4,485 cardholders from becoming ineligible due to their rising income. The department has also worked to meet the challenge of the opioid epidemic by utilizing PACE's academic detailing program, a partnership with Harvard University, to provide physician education on the proper prescribing and use of opioids.

To meet the rising need for seniors in need of protective services, the department filtered \$2.1 million in new funding appropriated by the General Assembly to the AAA network. Most AAAs utilized these dollars to add new staff to handle their ever-growing caseload. Some also used funds to hire or train staff as forensic accountants to address complex financial exploitation cases. Further, the department has and will continue to work with our partners in the General Assembly to address the 2015 *Peake v. Commonwealth* decision of the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania and change the Older Adult Protective Services Act to reflect the decision of the

Court. The proposed update would permit the reinstatement of employment bans; provide an effective means of protecting elderly citizens from abuse and exploitation and allow qualifying offense applicants a waiver process to show necessary rehabilitation and other factors; giving them the opportunity for employment in a long-term care setting.

The department has advanced several initiatives to better understand and address the needs of Pennsylvania's diverse senior population. In 2018, the department held the inaugural LGBTQ Aging Summit to help connect long-term care stakeholders and providers with the LGBTQ community to improve access to care and cultural competency. Recognizing a need to push forward on the State Plan for Alzheimer's created in 2014, the department created the Alzheimer's State Plan Taskforce consisting of stakeholders and family members of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. This taskforce is working to elevate local, regional, and statewide approaches to achieve the goals set forth in the state plan. Further, following a statewide listening tour, the department formed a Grandfamilies Workgroup comprised of both grandparents and stakeholders to further combat the devastating effects the opioid crisis has on grandparents. We will engage with this workgroup over the next several months to assess opportunities to improve how we can assist grandfamilies who may have needs as caregivers and be challenged with accessing support.

In addition to these new initiatives, the department and the aging services network upheld their responsibility to serve seniors by providing approximately 9-million meals and 1.6-million rides in fiscal year 2017-18. Over 250,000 individuals were served through PACE/PACENET, and we provided free, unbiased insurance counseling to nearly 200,000 Medicare beneficiaries.

Governor Wolf's proposed 2019-2020 budget provides a clear vision to further protect Pennsylvania's most vulnerable. Reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation have grown over 42% from 2014 through 2017 and the amount of substantiated reports rose 32% during that same time period. As you may be aware, the Office of State Inspector General released a report earlier this year highlighting areas for improvement in both the delivery of protective services by the AAA network and the department's oversight of the provision of protective services. The governor has prioritized meeting the challenge of an ever-rising need and the concerns raised in the report by proposing an additional \$2.8 million for protective services; building on last year's investment of \$2.1 million to help protect seniors from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Prior to the Office of State Inspector General findings, the department began rigorous work internally to enhance the quality of protective services. The department has taken many steps to improve our oversight and support the AAA network through training and technical assistance. Recognizing the critical need, beginning in 2017, we bolstered our review of the AAAs to deliver more consistent monitoring and provide more meaningful technical assistance. We developed more aggressive timeframes for follow-up monitoring visits of AAAs where issues of non-compliance exist. We have hired a director of education and outreach that will coordinate training contracts and services. The process of increasing the frequency and enhancing the quality of our trainings is moving forward. Though much has been done already, more work is always needed. Additional funding, along with continued training and monitoring support from the department, will give AAAs the tools they need to carry out the critical work of protecting our most vulnerable seniors.

This budget proposal also builds on investments in long-term services and supports – to meet the needs of older Pennsylvanians where they want to be served, in their own homes and communities. The budget supports our aging services network that helps address the health and wellness of older Pennsylvanians to keep them healthier longer and avoid the expenses of costlier, more institutional settings.

Seniors are part of the vibrant fabric that makes Pennsylvania unique. However, they often live with worry of paying for medications, being able to stay at home as they age, or reprising the role of a parent to their grandchildren due to the opioid crisis. I look forward to working with you, the aging services network, and all other stakeholders to ensure that the department has the funding needed to ease the burdens of older Pennsylvanians and allow them to age with dignity.