

Administration on Aging Listening Forum
on the
Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act
Alexandria, Virginia
February 25, 2010

Testimony

Presented by

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Good Afternoon,

The State of Illinois covers 55,583.58 square miles and is 395 miles North to South, from the Chicago area past river towns, coal mining communities and fertile farmland, to the beautiful forests of Southern Illinois. The state population is 12,901,563, with 2,176,100, or 16.9%, aged 60 or over.

The Illinois Aging Network is strong and is turning the principles of the Older Americans Act into reality in many ways.

Area agencies and our service network are recognized as the most effective means to reach, inform and assist older persons. In FY 2009, an estimated 502,400 unduplicated individuals received service from Title III supported programs.

Add to this figure those individuals who were assisted with Medicare Part D questions and enrollment. It's difficult to imagine how Medicare Part D could be managed by older persons without our assistance.

During the current three year area plan cycle, assessing local communities for "aging readiness," or the Maturing of Illinois, has been a statewide initiative. Our findings will be provided to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly next January. Unfortunately, as we have worked with over 50 communities across the state, their circumstances are changing due to the recession. It is more important than ever for the Aging Network to provide best practices, technical assistance, and leadership at the local level to assure that the needs of older persons are understood and considered as they reach unprecedented numbers in this nation.

Illinois Area Agencies on Aging have embraced the implementation of evidence-based health promotion and disease prevention initiatives. Project 2020 will continue to improve the lives of older persons and decrease the costs to states and the national government for acute and long term care services.

Area Agencies have collaborated on a statewide web-based resource inventory to increase access to information about services. Access to information is critical to the ability of older persons and their families to plan, make decisions, and cope with the challenges of long-term care services and supports.

The Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging includes all thirteen Illinois Area Agencies on Aging. I offer for your consideration the following recommendations from my colleagues.

We need additional Title III E funding for respite. Respite provides a necessary break for caregivers, allowing them to refresh and recharge. Their caregiving keeps older adults out of Long Term Care facilities. Our ability to provide

practical and concrete services to caregivers enhances all of our other outreach, education, and support activities.

Increase national awareness of senior services. When Congress re-authorizes the Older Americans Act, they set law that governs the performance of all. Attention needs to be paid to promoting the Aging Network and the multitude of supports and resources we provide for all older persons of all means. We are not just for low income clients.

We would like to see more emphasis and appropriations for mental health and aging. Our network encounters the full range of mental health issues every day. We want to see care plans that are enriched through professional advise, guidance and medical attention for those who are experiencing isolation, depression, dementia, and life-long mental illness issues.

Move Title V to the Administration on Aging for administering the program. The Department of Labor has lost the essence of community service in the administration of the law.

Make Title V guidelines less restrictive. We need to do something to help former middle class seniors who are out of work.

Title V performance measures include a 20% wage increase over the minimum wage when enrollees go to subsidized employment. This often is just not feasible.

Increase the amount of funding and/or the percentage we can use for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and lower the age limit to 50 for Title III E Grandparents Raising Grandchildren services.

We have done a great job with Medicare Part D and would like to see more funding for Information and Assistance and Benefits Counseling.

Fund Title III C as a title, not as C-1 and C-2. In FY 2009, only 25% of the more than 10,000,000 Title III C meals served in Illinois were congregate, while 68% of the Title III C allocation was for congregate meals. ARRA money was similarly allocated, two-thirds for congregate and one-third for home delivered meals. The number of persons receiving home delivered meals in Illinois has almost doubled in the past 24 years, while the number of congregate meal participants has decreased by close to 50%. We need the flexibility to fund the services according to the need.

We ask that funding for the Act be increased so that every state receives a share of new appropriations. As the aging population grows, so should the funding that is needed to continue to provide services to those who need them most.

We look forward to continuing to work to further the goals of the Older Americans Act.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.