



CENTRAL OFFICE:
17 North Front Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101-1624
PH. 717-232-7554 FAX 717-232-2162

NORTH OFFICE:
P.O. Box 60769, Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
PH. 717-526-1010 FAX 717-526-1020

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE AGING AND YOUTH COMMITTEE
ON THE DEPARTMENT OF AGING'S PLAN TO CENTRALIZE THE ASSESSMENT OF
INDIVIDUALS NEEDING LONG TERM CARE SERVICES

Presented by
Bracken Burns, Washington County Commissioner

March 27, 2007
Harrisburg, PA

Good Morning. I am Bracken Burns, Washington County Commissioner. I am also a former Washington County Area Agency on Aging Director and Past President of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. CCAP is a non-profit, non-partisan association providing legislative, training, insurance, technology, research, and similar services for all of the Commonwealth's 67 counties.

I am here today to speak on behalf of CCAP as well as Washington County. We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments to the Senate Aging and Youth Committee on the Pennsylvania Department of Aging's plan to centralize the assessment of individuals needing Long Term Living services.

Pennsylvania is fortunate to have an established aging and long term care system model including a network of 52 local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Residents and elected officials in all 67 counties have referred to the AAAs as the single point of contact for individuals in need of publicly funded long term care services since the 1980's. Although not all 52 AAAs in Pennsylvania are directly under the oversight of county government, commissioners serve on the majority of all AAA Governing Boards. My home county of Washington is an example of this. Washington, Fayette and Greene counties are served by the Southwestern PA AAA, Inc.

In February 2007 CCAP received the first notice that the administration had disclosed plans to make changes regarding the consumer eligibility determination role currently fulfilled by Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). We were informed that the proposal was to separate the long term care services assessment function from AAAs and have the function conducted by a state contracted vendor instead of the AAA. Since that announcement, CCAP has received more contacts from Commissioners in response to this issue than any other issue involving counties and human services in recent times. The responses have been unanimous – concern for individuals in need of long term care services, questions as to why the administration did not discuss concerns with AAAs and counties prior to announcing the plan, requests for county involvement regarding the administration's concerns and possible solutions and opposition to the current plan.

CCAP was informed that when the proposed change was announced it was explained that the change was proposed in an effort to increase cost efficiency, ensure consistent assessments, and reduce potential conflicts of interest by separating the assessment from the care plan and care management function.

We are in full support of the administration's interest in ensuring that individuals in need of long term care receive consistent, cost efficient eligibility determinations that are free of potential conflict of interest. At the same time, we strongly believe that to be most effective in addressing needs of individuals this should be done locally and with accountability, as the most effective way to serve our seniors.

While consistency and cost effectiveness are key factors in responsible human services administration and service delivery, CCAP believes that separating the assessment

function from the AAA is not the best method for addressing these concerns and in fact brings major potential consequences that will likely result for our vulnerable seniors and their families.

For over 20 years, Pennsylvanians have relied on the ability to contact their local AAA as the entry point and connection to publicly funded long term care services. That connection has provided individuals with the benefit of a consolidated local source of information on available resources, eligibility determinations, and care planning services to assist with the journey into the world of long term care. A separation of services may result in confusion, delay in services, lack of working knowledge of local resources and contacts, frustration of relaying situations multiple times and may deter those individuals most in need from seeking services.

When CCAP learned of the administration's plan, staff contacted the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) and Office of Long Term Living (OLTL) and requested a meeting to discuss the plan and concerns received from CCAP members. PDA and OLTL staff confirmed that the plan was based on concerns related to consistency, cost effectiveness and potential conflict of interest. CCAP has requested the opportunity to work with the administration and AAAs to discuss the concerns, review data and information the plan was based on, and participate in dialogue regarding development and possible implementation of alternative resolutions of the administration's concerns.

We believe the risks for our vulnerable citizens far outweigh any potential benefits that may have been suggested in support of separating the assessment function from the care planning and care management functions. Let us concentrate our efforts on working together to continually enhance consistency, cost effectiveness and protection from conflict of interest while still protecting the best interests of our seniors and adults in need of long term care.

I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of someone who is seeking help for a loved one. During stressful and emotional times, having assistance and support from an entity that has a true understanding of the unique aspects of a given community is crucial to assure some level of comfort that the right decisions are being made. No one operating from a statewide perspective can offer the level of personal understanding and knowledge of local resources than someone from your community. Let us work cooperatively to help address the administration's concerns and preserve the ability for individuals to be assisted by our local agencies who have developed a deep working knowledge of available resources and options. This will help to ensure that informed decisions and necessary connections to services are accomplished as seamlessly and effectively as possible.

In closing, let me offer one final comment regarding the concerns raised over the plan to centralize assessments of individuals needing long term care services and separate this function from AAAs. CCAP is committed to working with the administration and AAAs to address the administration's concerns and help ensure that individuals in possible need of long term care services receive consistent, timely and cost effective assessments.

We are requesting the opportunity to actively participate with the administration and AAAs to review the current assessment practices; discuss the administration's concerns and development of possible options to address the concerns, and ensure that Pennsylvania's adults in need of long term care services receive a non-fragmented, effective local connection to services to address their needs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our concerns and offer remarks. I will be pleased to answer your questions.