

Testimony of the Pennsylvania Association of Senior Centers  
To the  
Senate Committee on Aging and Youth  
April 8, 2008

Madame Chairlady and members of the Committee: The Pennsylvania Association of Senior Centers (PASC) applauds your efforts to move toward more efficient and less costly methods of addressing issues directly related to our state's aging senior population.

You know that I, as a former member of the House and the Senate, fully appreciate the near Herculean and Solomon like tasks you are asked to perform in attempting to distribute fairly and effectively limited resources among unlimited needs and demands.

During the 1971-72 Session when, as a legislative aide, I helped to draft the initial lottery act I never imagined that this single Act would eventually provide the principle source of revenue for the array of programs it supports today. Thirty-eight years ago we were simply looking for a way to lessen the local property tax burden for seniors and to provide basic transportation for their grocery and shopping needs, medical appointments, and social activities – with the singular goal of facilitating the ability of our aging seniors to remain in their homes and out of costly nursing home care for as long as possible.

Today, as medical advances have allowed people to live longer lives and as the number of aging seniors is about to increase dramatically with the so-called “baby boomer” generation, we continue to wrestle with this same issue: Can we avoid the high cost of long term nursing home care by facilitating the ability of aging seniors to remain in their homes? Those who provide home and community based services know that we can do so – if we are willing to evolve and make the necessary funding commitments.

Within the array of home based and community services, Pennsylvania's network of 520 Senior Centers and their 130 satellites are developing new ways to assist in helping aging seniors to avoid long term nursing home care – and contrary to popular thought, only

27% of these facilities are located in urban areas; 51% are in rural areas; and the remaining 22% are in suburban areas of our Commonwealth.

Often with assistance from their local Area Agency on Aging, the Centers serve as sites for a variety of evidence based programs that have been proven to work: Including disease prevention and nutritional education; health screenings and personal action plans to address deficiencies; and personal fitness training. Sometimes, this training is for very basic needs...and success. As one participant wrote: “Prior to attending...classes, I was unable to tie my shoes and fasten some of my undergarments...After 4 weeks I am able to bend over and tie my shoes; Also, I can fasten all of my undergarments. My doctor told me ‘Whatever you are doing, keep on doing it.’” Other participants report, “my blood sugars and blood pressure are now normal...I am no longer tired, depressed and sluggish.” (A composite sampling of similar testimonials statewide is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Committee this week.)

Senior Centers recognize that, as a group, they have not adequately informed or educated members of the Legislature or of the Administration as to exactly how creative they have been or how many specific services they now provide – all directed to facilitating the ability of aging seniors to remain as healthy as possible, for as long as possible, to reduce, as much as possible, admission to more costly long term care facilities.

The Centers do not disagree with Secretary Nora Eisenhower’s previously expressed contention that Senior Centers need to find and develop new, untapped sources of revenue within their own communities. In fact, the Centers, some of which have a staff of only a single person, have moved in this direction long before the Department articulated it. In her cover letter to the Pennsylvania Senior Community Center Capacity Survey Report, published by the Department of Aging in May of 2007, Secretary Eisenhower acknowledged “Senior Centers have successfully diversified funding sources for the operation of the centers.”

But the facts are that Senior Centers cannot continue their evolution as community service sites at the pace the Departments of Aging and Welfare would like to see – and at the pace that is necessary to prepare for the “baby boomers” – without an injection of direct state support during this transition period.

The Centers recognize that asking for direct state aide at this time is a difficult request. They know that an increase in the Aging Block Grant Program, to permit the AAA’s to adequately fund all home and community based care, to address service reductions and waiting lists, and to retain a trained stable workforce, will cost approximately \$72 million and will increase the base cost for next year.

The Centers also recognize that in the present economy even a capital appropriation of \$16 million for site improvements and emergency repairs can be a difficult request. Nevertheless, that is exactly what is needed to repair and improve the existing physical facilities of the Centers.

As Senator Rafferty noted during a recent Appropriations Committee hearing, two years ago the Legislature inserted into the budget \$4 million for Grants to Senior Centers for capital improvements. That amount was a positive approach that funded approximately twenty to twenty-five per-cent of the need at that time and allowed the Centers that received grants to leverage matching donations from local businesses and other community contributors.

The Pennsylvania Association of Senior Centers (PASC) respectfully requests and urges the members of the Senate Committee on Aging and Youth to advocate, at the very least, for capital funds to repair and maintain Center sites as suitable facilities for the provision of community based services necessary to reduce or delay long term care admissions.

In order to accumulate additional revenue to meet the Centers’ capital needs and the other home and community based service needs articulated by the Senior Support Coalition, PASC also urges the members of the Committee to support the proposals of Revenue

Secretary Tom Wolf to amend the Lottery Act and the Liquor Control Act. Specifically, these proposals would allow the Lottery to offer a greater variety of consumer preferred, fast selling, instant games by lowering the long outdated 30% net revenue requirement to 20% and would permit the Commonwealth's 600 plus State Stores to serve as additional Lottery sales outlets.

Finally, PASC urges the Committee to advocate for the continuing proposition that Lottery funds should be utilized first and foremost for the purpose the Lottery was initially enacted: To facilitate the ability of our aging seniors to remain in their homes and out of more costly nursing home care for as long as possible.

Thank you for providing today's opportunity to Pennsylvania's Senior Centers and to the Senior Support Coalition. Godspeed in the tasks before you.

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