

**Testimony in support of increasing FY23 Budget Expenditures of Exec. Office of Health & Human Services and Department of Human Services to better meet the needs of RI's older population.**

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I want to thank the members of the House Finance Committee for this opportunity to voice our support for greater investments in our state's human services programs, especially as they impact older Rhode Islanders.

The time is now to invest in our state's human services infrastructure, including reinstating the Department of Healthy Aging and giving it the staffing it needs to administer to the growing needs of our aging population. There are several bills and administrative actions which would have a major impact on improving the lives of our older Rhode Islanders beginning THIS YEAR.

The major actions include: 1) rebuilding the state's administrative capacity to address the growing needs of our aging population; 2) reinstating the \$17 million in Perry-Sullivan funds into the FY23 budget to expand home and community-based care including increasing wages for care workers; and, 3) ending the waivers delaying the full implementing the provisions of the 2021 Nursing Home Staffing and Quality Care Act to improve staffing in nursing homes.

Here is one of hundreds of stories to remind us why this investment is critical.

Last week, an elderly man from Cranston wrote to me: **"I have learned recently that many of us, including myself, were dropped from Medicaid some three or four months ago and were never informed. I found out the hard way when I tried to renew my two-year RIPTA bus pass. We were also not informed that we could simply reapply, which I am still in the process of now..."**

This man is understandably upset and frustrated that he did not receive the information he needed in time to prevent an unnecessary disruption in vital services. Too often we hear that basic information and guidance is very difficult to obtain.

When bureaucratic systems are over-stretched, things do not run smoothly. In this case, an eligible person has wrongly been denied his benefits. The question is why? Is Medicaid too complex for the average consumer? It certainly is. Are there enough workers to handle the volume of growing demand for service to help us navigate through the maze of programs options? We think not.

My understanding is that Rhode Island has fewer than 100 workers handling the current Medicaid/LTSS caseload. By contrast, Massachusetts has about 1,000 Medicaid workers - ten times as many. Using a ratio calculated as Medicaid workers divided by the number of 65 and older adults in poverty, Rhode Island should have a total of 167 staff, not under 100 administering Medicaid/LTSS caseloads.

<b>Poverty Status by Sex &amp; Age 2020</b>		
Below Poverty	RI	MA
Male		
65-74	3,351	19,859
75 and older	2,409	14,194
Female		
65-74	5,010	30,901
75 and older	5,655	33,379
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,425</b>	<b>98,333</b>
Medicaid/LTSS Workers	under 100	1,000
Ratio	0.0061	0.0102
RI Parity with MA	167	
<i>Source: US Census 2020 Table B17001 Poverty Status by Sex and Age</i>		

According to the U.S. Census, the number of Rhode Islanders aged 65 and older has grown 32,085 from 2010 to 2020, a 22% increase. With this growth has been **the increase in the number of seniors in need of Medicaid assistance**: The number of 65 years and older persons in poverty from 2010 to 2020 increased by 4.9%, from 15,664 to 16,425, while RI's total number in poverty decreased by 4.5%.<sup>1</sup> The poverty rate of 75 years and older adults increased from 10.5% to 10.9%, with women in this age group having the highest poverty rate of 12.7% in 2020.

Rhode Island's total population of 65 years and older has grown by 20% from 152,183 in 2010 to 182,486 in 2020<sup>2</sup>, adding 30,303 people in this age group. Of this total, those **who live alone** has grown by 4,817, a 10% increase from 48,464 in 2010 individuals to a total of 53,281.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 & 2010 tables B17001 Poverty Status in Past 12 Months by Sex & Age

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 & 2010 table B09020 Relationship by Household Type of 65 years and older population

## Rhode Islanders 65 years and older by Household Type

	2010	2020	% Change	% Change
TOTAL POPULATION	1,052,886	1,057,798	4,912	0.5%
TOTAL 65 Years+ Population	152,183	182,486	30,303	19.9%
% of Total	14%	17%		
In family households:	90,575	115,299	24,724	27.3%
In nonfamily households:	53,504	59,699	6,195	11.6%
Living Alone	48,464	53,281	4,817	9.9%
In Group Quarters	8,104	7,488	(616)	-7.6%

*Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census*

While many aging adults have rejoined their families and others share a residence with non-family friends, those who live alone are particularly vulnerable. RI Statewide Planning projects people sixty-five and older will grow to over 240,000 by 2030. ***Rhode Island should be increasing plans, resources and services to meet the needs of our aging population, not cutting back.***

Maureen Maigret, Chair of the Long-Term Care Coordinating Council and Senior Agenda's Policy Advisor, and a long time elected and appointed leader serving our state recalls her tenure as the Director of RI's Department of Elderly Affairs. When she left the department in 1994, the budget for FY95 was \$13.9 million and had sixty full-time employees. The state budget office shows the FY22 reviews budget for the Office of Healthy Aging at \$12 million and thirty-one employees.

We need to invest in our nursing and personal care workforce for home and community-based care to meet the needs of our older population. We do not have enough nursing care and home care workers to meet the needs in nursing homes and older adults aging in the community in part because **the jobs pay so poorly**. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2020 Occupation Wage Survey there are over 10,000 nursing assistants and nearly 10,000 home health and personal care aides in our state. According to the Economic Progress Institute's Standard of Need report, **starting wages in these jobs are half of what it takes to meet average household income needs.**

In conclusion, Rhode Island needs to put in place a comprehensive investment strategy to address the current and projected needs of its older population. The time for action is now. The FY23 budget needs to reflect a much greater commitment to a shared value of aging with dignity in our Rhode Island community.