

140



**AARP New York**

**Testimony before the  
Joint Legislative Budget Committee  
Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means**

**Human Services  
February 4, 2015**

**Legislative Office Building  
Albany, New York**

**Introduction**

Good afternoon, Senator DeFrancisco, Assemblyman Farrell, and members of the Committee. My name is Laura Palmer and I am acting Associate State Director for Advocacy for AARP in New York. AARP is a membership organization with over 2.6 million members in New York State. I would like to submit the following testimony regarding the human services portion of the Executive Budget.

My statement will focus on two basic areas of import to our membership: State Office for the Aging (SOFA)-funded programs, and Kinship Care Programs run by the Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS).

**New York State Office for the Aging (SOFA)**

The Executive Budget makes several investments in SOFA programs that we strongly support.

**NY Connects – No Wrong Door**

First, the Executive Budget proposes an additional \$8.2 million for FY 2015 for the NY Connects program. NY Connects is a statewide, locally-based point of entry system that provides one stop access to free, objective, and comprehensive information and assistance on accessing long-term care services and supports.

According to SOFA, from April 2013 - March 2014, the majority of individuals contacting NY Connects did so for assistance with Home Based Services (57,601), followed by Consumer and Caregiver Supports (56,427), Insurance/Benefit Information & Counseling (45,882), Residential/Housing Options and Supports (28,499), Transportation (21,102), Nutrition (15,709), Mental Health, Cognitive Status, Support Groups/Counseling (8,208), Prescriptions/Medications (7,756), and Legal Services (7,555).

AARP recommends the Legislature support this appropriation.

### **Caregiving – Respite and Alzheimer’s Disease Services**

The Governor also proposes a significant investment in caregiver supports. The Executive Budget invests \$25 million to increase funding for caregiver respite services, including \$16.5 million in additional funding for Alzheimer’s Disease Assistance Centers and the Alzheimer’s Disease Community Assistance Program. AARP understands that the \$16.5 million will be allocated to support statewide respite services through an RFP process administered by the Department of Health and SOFA.

Over the summer of 2013, AARP New York, the Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City, Inc., and the NYS Caregiving and Respite Coalition, along with several other organizations concerned with the wellbeing of frail New Yorkers and their informal caregivers, convened a series of 14 listening sessions across New York to hear directly from caregivers as well as service providers. It was very apparent from these listening sessions that caregivers are in desperate need of respite services to continue helping frail seniors age in place but are not receiving these services. The \$25 million will help more caregivers access these services, and AARP recommends the Legislature support this appropriation.

### **Waiting List – Non-Medicaid funded home-and-community-based care services**

AARP was also pleased to see that SOFA’s community-based programs remained essentially intact and the Executive retained the \$5 million 2014 legislative add to Community Services for the Elderly (CSE). However, the current level of funding fails to meet the current need. Further, the additional funding being proposed for NY Connects will appropriately result in more New Yorkers trying to access these services, only to be placed on waiting lists.

Based on county data submitted to SOFA, the Association on Aging in New York estimates that almost 7,700 people are waiting for non-Medicaid funded home-and-

community-based services that are administered by SOFA. These services provide people with the care they need while saving taxpayer money by keeping individuals out of significantly more expensive institutional care settings.

A recent AARP-commissioned poll revealed that the majority of New York State voters aged 50 and over would prefer to receive long-term care services at home rather than in a long-term care facility. We believe that the poll shows strong support for New York to make an investment in home-and-community-based services that not only help seniors to age in place, but keep them out of expensive Medicaid-funded nursing homes.

Family support is a key factor in determining an older person's ability to remain in his or her home and community, and out of institutional care settings such as nursing homes. However, the care provided by family members comes at a cost, both to the caregiver and to their families.

AARP believes New York State should make an additional investment in non-Medicaid home-and-community-based care that not only assists older persons but their family caregivers as well. New York State's lack of commitment to older residents and their caregivers comes at the wrong time – as our population ages, leaving fewer caregivers to care for more frail elderly.

AARP recommends that the Legislature eliminate the waiting list for SOFA administered programs and provide an additional \$21 million for the CSE program – and we believe this investment will save taxpayers money by reducing demands for Medicaid. CSE is a flexible funding stream, which allows local Area Agencies on Aging and community-based agencies to address areas of greatest need within their communities. While some communities have waiting lists for home delivered meals and social model adult day services, others need more funding for in-home personal care services and assisted transportation.

### **Office for Community Living**

The Governor, in his Article VII bill, proposes that SOFA seek public input from stakeholders about the creation of an Office of Community Living with the goal of providing improvements in service delivery and improved program outcomes for older adults and people of all ages with disabilities.

AARP believes that the creation of this new office could service older New Yorkers well if the process conducted by SOFA does not rush to combine aging and disability programs. SOFA must conduct a thorough and methodical review of the various programs across state agencies that serve older New Yorkers and determine how these would be funded and operated in the Office of Community Living alongside disability programs.

AARP looks forward to participating in this process and making sure that both older adults and people of all ages with disabilities receive the services they need and deserve.

### **Office of Children and Family Services**

Kinship programs serve children and caregivers in kinship families. Most are not foster care families, but families outside of the foster care system. These families provide what is called kinship care.

Children often come to live with grandparents and other relative caregivers due to unfortunate circumstances. Some were abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents. Many others have parents who are alcohol and/or substance abusers, or who are deceased, mentally ill, or unable or unwilling to parent.

The NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) administers kinship programs, including the Kinship Navigator. Funding for the kinship caregiver program has

decreased dramatically, from a high of \$2.9 million for local programs in FY 2009 to funding of less than \$600,000 in the current 2015-16 Executive Budget proposal.

These kinship programs have kept countless children out of foster care and by so doing, have provided better outcomes for the children and undoubtedly saved the state millions of dollars. Kinship programs have cost the state about \$500 per child per year while non-specialized foster care costs the state well over \$22,000 per child per year. Despite these figures, kinship programs have seen drastic cuts over the last four years, leaving many programs unfunded and unable to provide services.

The Governor's proposed FY 2015-16 provides \$338,750 for local kinship services and \$220,000 for the Kinship Navigator. Given that there are as many as 300,000 children in kinship care, and that these children have many of the same risk factors as do foster care children, it is important that New York State provide more assistance to kinship families.

The Kinship Navigator operates a toll free "warm" line and a web site with over 50 legal fact sheets and an extensive list of kinship resources. Last year, the Navigator served over 3,800 kinship families from every county in the State, 38% of which were from New York City. Local kinship services provide direct services, including support groups, advocacy, education, and case management.

New York State's kinship families are a fundamental resource, providing loving homes for countless numbers of children. In fact, one in eleven of all children and one of five of all children of color will live with kin during their childhood. Given that kinship services are a cost effective alternative to foster care, it is important that New York State have a robust kinship program that serves caregivers across the state.

AARP requests the Legislature add \$1 million for kinship programs and \$100,000 for Catholic Family Center's Kinship Navigator.

**Conclusion**

Thank you again for allowing AARP to testify regarding human services in New York State. The programs I have highlighted will not only help thousands of New Yorkers and their families, but will undoubtedly save taxpayer money now and in the future.

