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*Serving Ohio's Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey,  
Harrison, Holmes,  
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years*

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Date: 6/24/09

Contact: Jim Endly, (800) 932-7277, ext. 4700 or (740) 435-4700

For Immediate Release:

*AAA9 joins AARP in Advocacy Effort. Toll-Free Advocacy Number  
Established. Proposed cuts in PASSPORT and Basic Community  
Services Put 28,000 at risk. Outcry Heard From Across the  
State.*

AARP has established a toll free 800 number to make it more convenient for older adults, their families, caregivers, and friends to call their legislators and advocate for aging services in Ohio. Call (800) 926-5875 enter your zip code and you will be automatically forwarded to your legislators office. Once connected, callers should simply ask, "Are you going to fully fund PASSPORT, home delivered meals, and medical transportation services?" Tell them that, "you are counting on their support on behalf of older Ohioans." AAA9 CEO/Executive Director Alan Burnett encourages everyone to call today!

*Statement from Jane Taylor, state director for AARP Ohio:*

"New and additional cuts proposed in the PASSPORT program will have 10,000 older adults put on waiting lists to receive in-home and community-based services such as home-delivered meals, visits by health aides and transportation to the doctor. An additional 18,000 older Ohioans will be cut off from basic community services including assisted living, homemaker help with chores and group lunches at community centers where health screenings and monitoring is performed. All told, the latest round of proposed budget cuts will deny a total of 28,000 older Ohioans the care they need to remain living at home and active in their communities.

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Inevitably, many of these vulnerable elders won't be able to hold on and remain at home without help and will be forced into skilled nursing facilities to get the care they need – at THREE times the cost to receive services in their own homes. AARP Ohio continues to encourage the state to implement a single unified long-term care system – one that allows Medicaid dollars to follow the individual into the most appropriate and affordable care setting, a unified system that promotes the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

It makes no sense to put Medicaid funds for nursing homes in a separate budget, allowing frail older Ohioans no other choice but to get care in the most restrictive and most expensive environment. For 9 out of 10 older Ohioans, nursing homes are the least preferred and most expensive option. A single unified long-term care system would put funding where the demand for service is greatest, rather than restrict the choices of those who don't need 24-hour skilled nursing care but have no other option than to enter a nursing home if PASSPORT is unavailable.

A unified long-term care budget allows the most effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars, both in the best and the worst economic climates, and is crucial when Medicaid funding is severely restricted. AARP Ohio encourages the governor and state legislature to continue to work to implement a unified long-term care system that balances available Medicaid funding to provide a range of options for individuals and families who need services.”

Locally, the PASSPORT program is administered by the Area Agency on Aging Region 9 (AAA9). AAA9 is a major employer in Guernsey County employing 74 people and administering a \$24 million annual budget. AAA9 officials are encouraging everyone to call their legislators and the Governor's office and simply ask them not to cut PASSPORT funding.

For more information on this very important subject simply call AAA9 at (740) 439-4478 or (800) 945-4250.

From the June 24<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Columbus Dispatch  
Editorial: Enough already  
Lawmakers should stop allowing nursing homes to plunder Ohio's treasury  
Wednesday, June 24, 2009 3:02 AM

Ohio lawmakers would eviscerate libraries, health centers, food banks and child-abuse prevention programs, while protecting and enriching nursing homes in the next state budget. And that's just a fraction of how appalling the relationship is between state legislative leaders and the nursing-home lobby.

As Ohio's budget crisis worsens, Gov. Ted Strickland and lawmakers are required to erase a predicted \$3.2 billion deficit in the 2010-11 budget. The fiscal emergency has them poised to chop nearly every state-funded service -- except nursing homes.

In his original budget proposal, Strickland called for providing nursing homes with \$12.5 billion over the next four years.

The Democratic-controlled Ohio House then enriched the first two years of that plan by almost \$250 million. Not to be outdone, the Republican-controlled Ohio Senate further enriched it, adding another \$150 million in the first two years.

Over a four-year period, Senate Republicans would provide nursing homes with about \$13.7 billion -- \$1.2 billion more than Strickland recommended. Nursing-home owners and their lobbyists even persuaded GOP lawmakers to insert into Ohio law an annual rate increase beginning in 2013 -- a guarantee enjoyed by no other provider of Medicaid services.

To his credit, Strickland on Friday proposed new budget cuts that would roll back much, if not all, of the gain nursing homes made in the Senate.

But even if Strickland accomplished that, which appears unlikely, the next state budget would be far too generous to the nursing homes.

For decades, the industry has been among the most influential lobbying groups in Columbus. Through regular and generous campaign contributions, and mastering the art of emotional appeals, the industry has attained untouchable status in the Ohio legislature.

For a long time, this situation has been indefensible. Now, in a time of budget crisis, it is beyond immoral.

Most Ohioans -- like most Americans -- desire the resources to care for their elderly loved ones at home for as long as possible. The state has a moral obligation to do all it can to fulfill those desires.

It's not only the right thing to do, it's the sane thing to do financially. If Ohio simply shifted to the national average in the percentage of Medicaid dollars spent providing long-term care for the elderly in home and community settings, it would save nearly \$750 million a year, according to the respected consulting firm of Driscoll & Fleeter.

"The average annual nursing home cost in Ohio is about \$56,000 per person compared with \$12,000 per year per person for home care," Fleeter said.

Shamefully, Ohio ranks 44th among the states in the level of Medicaid spending directed to home and community-based services vs. institutional care.

Nursing homes "are one of the biggest suppliers of campaign cash in the state of Ohio and have been for the past 30 years," said John Begala, executive director of the Cleveland-based Center for Community Solutions. "It's so over the top, you couldn't make this stuff up."

As much as the Ohio Senate deserves shame, Ohio House Speaker Armond Budish has a special obligation to help clean up this nursing-home scandal. For many years, he has been a prominent "asset-protection lawyer" specializing in helping well-heeled clients shield their assets so they can get Medicaid to pick up the tab for nursing home stays. Yet, as a legislative leader, he is responsible for stretching every Medicaid dollar as far as possible. One of his best friends and political advisers is Alan Melamed, among the nursing-home industry's top lobbyists. This is a massively expensive conflict of interest.

Ohioans cannot afford, and should not tolerate, political payoffs costing them \$750 million a year.

## PASSPORT Cuts Make Medicaid Costs Skyrocket

In the proposed conference committee framework budget:

- **10,000 people denied PASSPORT, Assisted Living, and PACE services during the biennium**
  - A waiting list would begin July 1, 2009 and last the entire biennium.
- **Ohio loses valuable Enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (eFMAP):**
  - Ohio loses \$38.25 million in FMAP per year.
  - With lost state and federal funds, Ohio loses \$58.25 million per year for home and community based care.
  - **\$116.5 million is lost** for services to the frail elderly and disabled.
- **People on waiting lists turn to nursing homes:**
  - Experience has shown at least 17% of those on a wait list will turn to nursing home care.
  - **7,800 people would enter a nursing home unnecessarily.**
- **Nursing homes cost three times more than the cost of PASSPORT:**
  - The total additional cost to the nursing home budget line would be \$406 million.
  - This is **an additional \$105 million in State funds** over the biennium.
- **Changes in long-term care spending today are hard to reverse:**
  - Experience shows when enrollment is limited or closed, referral sources stop sending individuals to home and community based services making it difficult to reverse changes.
  - Once people have been in nursing homes for extended periods, moving home to the community is hard.

**Let Older Ohioans Choose Their Long-Term Care  
Don't Force People into Nursing Homes**

**Fully Fund PASSPORT and other Home and Community Based Care**