



SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
FULL COMMITTEE

Renewing Our Commitment: How the Older Americans Act Uplifts Families Living with Aging-Related Diseases

November 5, 2025 – 3:30 PM

OVERVIEW

On Wednesday, November 5, the Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing titled, “Renewing Our Commitment: How the Older Americans Act Uplifts Families Living with Aging-Related Diseases.” Senators and the witnesses discussed: the Older Americans Act, volunteering, caregivers, neurodegenerative diseases, the impact of staff reductions and federal agency reorganization, transportation services, meal delivery and nutrition support, Long-Term Care Ombudsmen, protecting seniors against abuse and exploitation, local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), the effects of neurodegenerative diseases on language, isolation and loneliness, Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and boxing programs for individuals with Parkinson’s.

OPENING STATEMENTS

- Chairman Rick Scott (R-FL)*
- Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)*
**Opening statements not yet available*

WITNESS PANEL

- [Erick Montealegre](#) – Family Caregiver
- [Stephen Sappington](#) – Patient Advocate
- [Duana Patton](#) – USAging President, and CEO of the Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

Sen. Dave McCormick (R-PA) – How does support you receive from community volunteers complement federal programs like those supported by the Older Americans Act (OAA)?

Mr. Sappington – Volunteers are essential to programs for older Americans. Volunteers work “in concert” with benefits provided by the OAA. OAA provides transportation, nutrition, and other services, but volunteers help operationalize and complement these benefits. The OAA also funds programs volunteers run for people with Parkinson’s.

Sen. McCormick – Pennsylvania is home to 300,000 patients with Alzheimer’s, 50,000 patients with Parkinson’s, and their caregivers. What programs not currently supported under OAA would assist caregivers and Americans with neurodegenerative diseases?

Mr. Montealegre – Time is a crucial resource when it comes to neurodegenerative diseases. Building knowledge and awareness of treatments, therapies, and support services at the diagnosis point is ideal. There can be a delay between diagnosis and community interventions; shortening this time would be very impactful.

Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD) – I am a caregiver for my mother, who has dementia, while also parenting my own daughter. The OAA helps “bridge the gap” for caregivers, to allow older adults to live independently and with dignity. Congress almost passed a reauthorization of the OAA before it was derailed by a social media post from Elon Musk. Congress must reauthorize and strengthen the OAA and ensure the agencies which carry out its programs have the resources and stability they need. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) has been subject to “sweeping staffing reductions” and efforts to dissolve the agency and add its functions to another agency at the Department of Health and Human Services. How do these changes impact families and caregivers?

Ms. Patton – The OAA begins at the federal level, but State Units on Aging (SUAs) and local leaders also implement the program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) were required to be “very nimble,” adapting to changing circumstances to ensure families and caregivers receives services and supports. It is critical implementation and programmatic efforts under the OAA continue at the local level, and enable “innovative and responsive” actions, regardless of what is occurring at the federal level.

Sen. Alsobrooks – How do the services the OAA supports, like transportation, caregiver resources, and exercise programs, help people with Parkinson’s maintain function, stay connected, and live well?

Mr. Sappington – OAA provides vital support for people with Parkinson’s and their caregivers. OAA needs to be reauthorized to prevent disruptions in these services for those who rely on them. The OAA works “hand-in-hand” with the National Plan to End Parkinson’s Act; the OAA gives people with Parkinson’s services they need day-to-day, and the National Plan seeks a cure for the disease.

Sen. Ashley Moody (R-FL) – The OAA authorizes grants for the Long-Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Program and the Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Prevention Programs. Many OAA programs, including those like Meals on Wheels, function to identify seniors who may be in abusive or exploitative situations. How important are these programs—both those designed specifically to address exploitation and abuse, and those which have other primary purposes—to the aging population?

Mr. Montealegre – The LTC Ombudsman Program helps uncover unmet needs of seniors in LTC through personal connection, which can then be brought to facility and program managers to be addressed.

Sen. Moody – Does the reauthorizing legislation require any changes to facilitate better coordination with law enforcement when instances of abuse, exploitation, or neglect are identified?

Mr. Montealegre – LTC Ombudsmen are currently required to report such instances to the appropriate authorities, but more education can be done at the community level to ensure LTC residents are aware of their rights and how LTC Ombudsmen can be helpful to them.

Ms. Patton – The Ohio District 5 AAA administers an LTC Ombudsman Program and also administers the Adult Protective Service Program in certain regions. The OAA allows AAAs “to be the front door;” AAAs develop personal relationships with seniors and caregivers and may become aware of other things happening in the lives of those who reach out to an AAA for services. People may not realize they may be in abusive or exploitative situations, and they may be unaware of their rights and the supports able to help them.

Sen. Andy Kim (D-NJ) – How can Congress strengthen coordination across federal, state, and local levels to ensure families and caregivers have access to the supports they need?

Ms. Patton – Collaborative discussions between AAAs and other stakeholders, as well as increased awareness of AAAs the services they offer, will enable better coordination and programmatic improvement across all levels. The OAA allows AAAs to be “innovators.”

Sen. Kim – What priorities should Congress consider as it works on reauthorizing the OAA?

Ms. Patton – The OAA is designed to allow local administrators to determine local needs and tailor OAA programs to their communities. The law’s flexibility is important.

Sen. Kim – How can OAA programs better ensure caregivers and individuals from diverse communities have access to equitable supports, including through linguistically inclusive programming?

Mr. Montealegre – People with neurodegenerative diseases may “lose language,” and some will revert to only speaking their first language. Programs must be able to hire staff and design programs that will remain engaging for those who do not, or no longer, speak English.

Sen. Kim – My father received a formal Alzheimer’s diagnosis a few weeks ago. He has lost the ability to speak English. There are few places where my family can receive care and support in Korean. This issue is not just “academic” or “theoretical” for me.

Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) – Isolation and loneliness among seniors is getting worse; these factors are associated with an additional \$6.7 billion in Medicare spending. Limiting loneliness could lead to better health outcomes, protect against cognitive decline, and preserve quality of life for longer. How can our society “do better” in the face of increasing senior loneliness and isolation?

Ms. Patton – One of the other witnesses, Mr. Sappington, discussed how he was not aware of the value visiting a senior center would bring to his life. During the pandemic, the Ohio District 5 AAA offered grab-and-go meals; this service allowed one senior to improve his nutrition, reduce his usage of medication to manage his diabetes, and strengthen social and community bonds. Not all seniors have to go to a senior center to make bonds; others may benefit from becoming a volunteer in another program, or through other avenues. It is important to “meet people where they are.”

Sen. Husted – All AAAs are different. What are some examples of best practices AAAs use to engage seniors?

Ms. Patton – Some examples include “phone a friend” programs where seniors speak on the phone with each other, or partnerships with schools to offer intergenerational programs. OAA programs often bring people into seniors’ homes, including caregivers and meal providers, who are able to create strong connections with seniors and others in the home.

Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) – How does OAA connect older adults to multiple social services, like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)? How does OAA affect rural Americans?

Ms. Patton – The OAA is an “umbrella” over many services, which allows administrators to connect seniors to services like Medicaid and SNAP. In one example, our AAA has been able to leverage OAA to provide transportation to a senior who receives SNAP, who would otherwise be unable to use their SNAP benefits. However, AAAs and the services they provide may also help seniors avoid the need for these programs.

Mr. Montealegre – Broward County’s AAA is an “experimental” organization. They have partnered with technology companies to provide seniors with “robot” pets to protect against loneliness and isolation, and to utilize radar technologies for alert monitoring systems. The AAA is always looking for other programs, products, and resources to help seniors, but importantly, the AAA vets these products. This allows caregivers to feel safe that the products and programs the AAA recommends are “safe.”

Mr. Sappington – Local programs are closest to their communities, and have the best ability to understand what helps older adults and those living with neurodegenerative diseases. I support increasing funding for AAAs so they can partner with other innovative nonprofits and offer technical support and guidance to older adults who want to start local programs. The OAA also offers transportation services to connect older adults with services.

Ranking Member Gillibrand – Have you used any of those transportation services? Can you provide an example of how using those transportation services made a difference for you?

Mr. Sappington – I connected with a man who felt his Parkinson’s diagnosis was the end of the world. After speaking with him for several hours, we met up in person, halfway. I helped connect him to transportation services that would bring him to a Rock Steady Boxing class, which “worked out very well.”

Chairman Rick Scott (R-FL) – Mr. Sappington, please share more about Rock Steady Boxing.

Mr. Sappington – “It’s fun.” The programming involves music familiar to my generation, and all the activities are specifically designed to combat symptoms of Parkinson’s. The facilitators offer short instructions that require participants to use both the brain and body, and the exercises are appropriate for people with Parkinson’s. Over time, the muscle memory from these sessions can “override” some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s. Parkinson’s can take away your voice, and participants are encouraged to repeat instructions back, strengthening the voice.

Chairman Scott – Mr. Montealegre, how did your family find out about services available under the OAA?

Mr. Montealegre – We did not find them quickly enough. We started with internet searches, which added confusion. Eventually, after speaking with many “wrong” people, we found the right people, who were able to connect us with educational classes on the progression of dementia, symptoms, and how we could adapt as a family.

Chairman Scott – Ms. Patton, is there anything else you would like to share?

Ms. Patton – The discussion in today’s hearing has inspired me to consider the value of conversations with people who can share stories about how the OAA has made a difference. It is “invaluable” that AAAs connect with people before they are in crisis.

Chairman Scott – Do you believe AAAs both help people and save money?

Ms. Patton – “Absolutely.” The more innovative AAAs can be, the better.

Chairman Scott – Do AAAs help people stay active in a job or in volunteering?

Ms. Patton – Yes; AAAs can leverage OAA transportation services and work with other organizations to help seniors be engaged in volunteering opportunities.

Chairman Scott – Do any of the witnesses believe there is any reason Congress should not reauthorize the OAA?

None of the witnesses had a response.

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Please click [here](#) for the archived hearing.