

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement ***"The Older Americans Act: The Local Impact of the Law and the Upcoming Reauthorization"***

Good morning, the Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Welcome to today's hearing, which is entitled, *The Older Americans Act: The Local Impact of the Law and the Upcoming Reauthorization*. Today's hearing provides this Committee an important opportunity to discuss the unique impact the Older Americans Act, or as we call it around here – just like, everything has an acronym – OAA, has on communities all across the country.

OAA was passed into law in 1965 to establish a network of social services to support older Americans, complementing Medicare and Medicaid. By all measures—the Older Americans Act has succeeded.

Since its passage, OAA has served as the foundation for community social services for older adults—providing nutrition services, legal support, and social networking, among other services. The Act has a tangible impact on local communities—funding flows from the federal government to states and to communities to allow programs to be delivered in a way that works best for the locality.

This law supports countless older adults and nearly 20,000 service providers around the country. In Pennsylvania, an estimated 27 percent of older adults served by OAA are under the federal poverty line—the law's nutrition programs alone serve approximately 85,000 older Pennsylvanians.

Today, I'm releasing a brochure, which I am holding up and you wouldn't be able to see from the distance of your seats, but it's a brochure that highlights the impact of the Older Americans Act on Pennsylvanians. This brochure is entitled *Federal Policy on a Local Level: The Impact of the Older Americans Act Across Pennsylvania*, and it just has some examples of the individuals from different parts of our state and the services that are provided to them. It provides information on those eight Pennsylvanians who are receiving services from Older Americans Act programs across nine different counties.

Over time, the OAA has evolved to meet the unique challenges that older adults face—in recent years, by way of work that I have done and others, Congress added language to expand support to grandparents raising grandchildren.

Flexibility, of course, is the key. The COVID-19 pandemic required programs to innovate service delivery. We should be learning from this innovation as we move forward. This year, I am privileged once again to be the leader in negotiations to reauthorize the Older Americans Act. I am committed to building on my work in the last reauthorization to bolster support for older adults throughout Pennsylvania and throughout the Nation. I'll be prioritizing both funding and programming that helps the Older Americans Act keep pace with our rapidly aging population.

Just to name a few of my priorities: I'm working to pass the *Strategic Plan for Aging Act* along with Senator Gillibrand to incentivize states to bolster public-private partnerships and build communities that work for the older adults of today and for future generations.

In addition, I'm dedicated to uplifting the tireless work of Long-Term Care Ombudsmen. As the Committee has shown throughout its history, some older adults experience tremendous hardship in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are advocates for residents in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities—dealing with everything from no notice evictions and theft to serious neglect.

However, the program is stretched very thin—operating on a grossly inadequate budget, struggling to recruit and retain staff and volunteers. In some cases, one ombudsman may be serving 10,000 beds—well exceeding national recommendations of one to every 2,000 beds. Today, the GAO is releasing a report, which I requested, that shows the real impact these funding challenges have on residents.

We'll hear today from Mairead Painter, the State Ombudsman from Connecticut, who can discuss these struggles in much more detail. We'll also hear today from two Area Agency on Aging directors, including Leslie Grenfell representing Washington, Greene, and Fayette Counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania, who will discuss the very real challenges they face in delivering services to rural communities with limited funds. The Aging Services network deserves to be elevated and supported by the federal government.

And I am especially looking forward to hearing today from Janet Billotte, a meal delivery recipient from Clearfield County, in central Pennsylvania. I'm so grateful she's using her voice here today to share how OAA has helped her.

Finally, May is Older Americans Month—a time when our Nation comes together to honor the contributions of older Americans. I want to be clear - I will not support any attempts to undermine vital programs that support older adults in Pennsylvania and across the country. Our Nation's older adults have fought our wars, raised our children and our grandchildren, they have built our communities, and they deserve support as they age.

I'll now turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening comments.