



Southwestern Pennsylvania Partnership for Aging (SWPPA) is a 27-year-old, volunteer-led organization with over 300 members who represent over one million older adults across 10 counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania. The 10 counties served are Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland. SWPPA's mission is to serve as a catalyst to promote policy, program and systems change that improves quality of life for older adults.

SWPPA was created as a neutral forum for collaboration, information and best practice sharing, discussion and formulation of aging policy recommendations. We encourage and invite participation across all stakeholders interested in positively impacting older adults.

SWPPA's Policy Committee has identified four (4) areas of importance in relation to issues, policy, service and supports for those who are aging or disabled in Pennsylvania. To assure our members are making informed voting decisions this year, we respectfully ask you to review each area below and respond to the questions presented.

## **Western PA LGBTQ+ Older Adult Advocacy Team**

With a vision for fully inclusive communities where LGBTQ+ older adults have adequate and equal access to resources to live and thrive in safety, comfort, and with respect, the Western PA LGBTQ+ Older Adult Advocacy Team formed in early 2021.

The Team is a grassroots organization of persons who seek to advocate for LGBTQ+ older adults in the areas of housing, health and safety, social isolation, and transportation. Our mission is to educate and enable people to work in local settings to change laws, ordinances and social attitudes that will benefit the LGBTQ+ and other aging populations.

### **Candidates Forum Questions:**

#### **1. LOTTERY**

In 1972 the Legislature established the Pennsylvania Lottery to provide a restricted fund outside of the General Fund to assist low-income elderly residents to be able to remain in their own homes and to avoid institutionalization. The first program was property tax and rent assistance. As the Lottery grew the Legislature authorized additional programs to include off-peak transportation, pharmaceuticals, and other services through an Options program, administered by Area Agencies on Aging. These services are part of the general term Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) and include such things as home care and adult day services, all of which are designed to assist low-income elderly who do not qualify for similar Medicaid services. Adult protective services, senior community centers and the operation of the Department of Aging also are funded through the Lottery.

Several years ago the Legislature began transferring Lottery funds to the General Fund to support Medicaid programs and institutionalization, creating an ongoing waiting list for Options services described above.

***Please explain your position on the preservation and use of Lottery revenues to fund services for older Pennsylvanians.***

As a senior citizen myself with a mother who is 86, I feel the pain. Moving the funding to the general fund is one step away from reallocating it to pet projects that the general fund is known for, which is wrong. It needs to be separate because the funding provided is separate. Moving it only makes the slow process of ignoring the needs of our elderly. The candidate running on the right has made it well known that he is not a person who will handle any social program in a beneficial way to the elderly. If anything, we have to look at the program and should review it every three to five years to make ensure its being managed correctly.

***What are your thoughts about the practice of shifting lottery funds from HCBS to support institutionalization and what position would you take in that regard?***

As stated previously. The funds are dedicated to something that's needed. Do not touch something that is working. In he 50-year history the lottery has generated \$32 billion. Taxpayers don't feel it because of the nature of the funds. We need to protect and prevent the theft of this money by the people who see dollar signs in their eyes and think no one would notice. I would notice My mother would notice.

**2. OLDER ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES ACT/ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

Older Adult Protective Services (OAPS) have been the long-standing responsibility of several areas of government. This law provides a means to protect vulnerable older adults. The Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are responsible for assuring their areas have trained, functioning workers and processes who investigate suspected abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Their first goal is always to help the older adult and family to assure safety and meet needs. Police` departments and attorney generals/prosecutors may also become involved if the circumstances meet the threshold for being a crime and to protect citizens. Pennsylvania's law outlines who must report suspected abuse, neglect and exploitation (mandatory reporting). It also limited who is eligible to work with vulnerable older adults in certain care facilities and for certain care providers, such as nursing homes and home health care, based upon criminal history. People with many types of conviction had lifetime bans on employment in the field. This aspect of the law was challenged in Commonwealth Court and a December 2015 decision struck down the ban necessitating reconsideration of this law to balance the safety needs of older adults and the rights of citizens to work in aging services. The law created barriers to finding workers in a field that needs to increase its workforce. Additionally, many advocates in the field recognize that the law could better address financial exploitation. Legislation has been introduced by Rep. Tim Hennessy and Sen. Bob Mensch to amend this act. It is not clear that it will pass this legislative cycle and may come up in the next general assembly.

***What are your thoughts about balancing the need to protect vulnerable older adults and to assure the rights of Pennsylvania workers?***

This is a balancing act that has been around for many years. I have watched old episodes of Dagnet with the same problems with vulnerable adults. The point is the elderly in general, let alone those that have issue that make them more vulnerable have higher needs than the average citizen. So which is more important the need of the worker or the need of the vulnerable older adults. I think the one constant it the elderly having the need. So, knowing this we can look at the worst case scenario and work from there. Workers who have prior issues should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. With a baseline created that can be flexible to also allow those with prior criminal history to have rehabilitation. But again, this must be looked

at in a flexible yet critical way. What I am saying is a lifetime ban is extreme, but we also must balance that with people who deserve rehabilitation and can do the job effectively. The sad part is that the vulnerable get exploited by so called honest people all the time.

***Do you have a position on expanding efforts to recognize and address financial exploitation, which will mean including the banking and financial services industries in ways they have not been involved up to this point, including allowing them to freeze assets prior to an investigation by state and AAA authorities?***

I have been asked many times questions like this. We need to be ironclad with protections. We need to set a priority on protecting our elderly from scammers who prey on the elderly. I am for increased mandatory penalties as a partial deterrent. I would also like to see asset forfeiture for these scoundrels and the proceeds be redirected for our senior programs. This is going hand in hand with seniors living facilities. Many are honest reputable places. But there are many who also prey on the elderly with contract that's vague and take away family rights and legacies. We need to clamp down and do our job to protect our families and our seniors.

### **3. DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE ISSUES**

Nationally, we are in the midst of a direct care workforce crisis: As demand for direct care workers in a variety of long-term care settings continues to rise rapidly, the ability for Agencies to attract and hire at an equal pace is decreasing.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates an additional 1.1 million direct care workers will be needed by 2024 — a 26 percent increase over 2014. Yet, the population of potential workers who tend to fill these jobs, overwhelmingly women ages 25 to 64, will increase at a much slower rate. Other factors also impact this potential workforce – a robust economy offers workers more options with greater pay in less physically demanding settings; low Medicaid reimbursement rates (Medicaid funds a large portion of long-term services) make it impossible for direct care employers to adequately compete for these workers.

In Pennsylvania, the reality is just as startling. Our senior population is growing 20 times faster than Pennsylvania's overall population. By 2025, 1 in 5 Pennsylvanians will be older than age 65, with those younger than 65 steadily decreasing (based on US Census and PA State Data Center statistics). And so the challenge is, *who is going to care for our aging seniors?*

The most cost-effective type of care is care provided in settings of least restriction – most commonly home. Medicaid dollars can provide more care to more consumers over a longer period of time in less expensive settings. Unfortunately, without an adequate workforce to support care in this setting, we will never fully realize the impact of this cost saving approach. The primary obstacle in building a strong direct care workforce is low wages and unstable work conditions, driven largely by low Medicaid reimbursement rates.

In Southwestern PA, Medicaid funded personal assistance services reimburses at a rate of \$19.32/hour. The average hourly wage of a personal care aide is just over \$10/hour. The additional costs for benefits, insurance, training and supervision can easily add another \$5 to \$7/hour to the hourly cost to provide care. To remain operational, agencies who provide Medicaid funded services must struggle to keep costs under \$19.32/hour, which means keeping wages low, reducing the benefits offered and limiting quality and oversight activities, which are costly. The daily reimbursement rate for adult day services has not been increased in twelve years. This reality further challenges providers in their effort to attract and retain a viable workforce.

***Given Pennsylvania's aging demographics, the increasing demand for Medicaid waiver funded services and the current direct care workforce crisis, what recommendations might you make to assure Pennsylvania can create a robust and ready workforce, supported by living wages, able to meet the demand for care?***

Since Covid Pandemic many in our workforce have made choices to retire or choose not to work. A very unusual situation that has affected the healthcare and service industry harder than most. First thing we need to do in Pa set a minimum wage to a living standard. Our platform is \$15 an hour. This should also include regular adjustments based on consumer price index. This will make it much easier for employers with a stable workforce. The employee stays longer and doesn't need a second or third job. They get to spend more time with their families. This is a direct benefit to the employers, who will save money recruiting and training. Both the employee and the employer benefit. A win win. Pennsylvania and the Federal government need to take a more direct approach to Medicaid funding. The aging issue is nothing new but has been pushed aside for a long time. The republicans have indicated they are in favor of rolling back Medicare and Medicaid as well as social security. That is not the answer. We need a proactive approach and stabilizing wages is a start but only a start. Metcalfe voted against Medicaid expansion I won't.

***What measures would you advocate for in changing this and improving our reimbursement rates in Southwest PA?***

As I said the government both state and federal needs to get off their backside and taking the aging issue seriously. I am a senior as well and know that my future is now and not tomorrow. I have also been paying for this since I was a kid. A few things to think about, Improving competition. The states need to fix and streamline the process and make it more competitive for the providers as well as the insurers. State agencies should hold hearings on the anticompetitive practices and in the process work to streamline competition by way antitrust practices. Stopping all or nothing contracts will also open it to competition and force the insurers to allow out of network at friendly rates and not the higher rates that that maximizes profits. We need WIN WIN

#### **4. LGBTQ+ EQUALITY FOR OLDER PENNSYLVANIANS**

Pennsylvania's lack of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law allows a Pennsylvanian identified as LGBTQ+ to be denied housing, employment, and access to public accommodations simply because of their sexuality. PA HB 300, commonly called the Fairness Act, seeks to amend the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, the state's non-discrimination law, to include "sexual orientation" and "gender identity or expression" as protected classes. Also, PA SB 437 is titled "LGBTQ Senior Community Grant Program Act" was introduced to award grants to non-profit organizations and local governments for health care, cultural competency, computer training, job placement, social activities, and other programs that specifically help the LGBTQ+ senior community.

***Please state your position about legislation that ensures justice and equality for LGBTQ+ older Pennsylvanians.***

Sadly we are not moving forward we are moving backwards in the human rights and human dignity area. HD 300 is a giant needed step forward and long overdue There are 22 other states that also welcome and protect people in the LGBTQ community. So why should we allow anyone to deny them housing, education, and public accommodations for simply being who they are or who they love. The fact is we have no right in government to allow actions that discriminate. This is why I am running to stop people like my opponent from continuing with their ideas that discriminate and trying to put them in action. NO we don't need a lawyer, let alone one who has been mentored by the Metcalfe.