

## Tuesday, April 4, 2023 – House Oversight Committee meeting regarding SCDOA

Good morning! I am Tim Womack, the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) director for the SC Appalachian Council of Governments (COG) covering Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg Counties. I've worked with the COG since 2010 and have been the Aging Services director since 2015.

Our AAA serves over 4,000 seniors with tangible services throughout our six-county region including congregate meals, home delivered meals, congregate transportation, non-emergency medical transportation, essential shopping, legal services, personal care, housekeeping, yard work, minor home repair, and health promotion. We accomplish these services through our extensive partner network including our Councils on Aging (COA), SC Legal Services, Rebuild Upstate, and many other contractors.

In 2022, families received \$890,945 of respite relief from caregiving responsibilities through our Family Caregiver Support Program; 4,085 Medicare and Medicaid recipients received counseling through our SHIP (State Health Insurance Program) counselors; over 20,000 seniors and caregivers' concerns and questions were answered by our Information & Referral/Assistance specialists; and 1,205 visits were made to long-term care facilities by our Ombudsman Department. Needless to say, our AAA and our provider network do great things for the Upstate of South Carolina!

The Appalachian AAA internal and pass through budget for FY22 totaled \$11,167,915. We receive our federal funds near the beginning of each year, followed by our State budget in July. Once we receive our Notice of Grant Award (NGA), our office distributes the funds and contracts as quickly as possible. It normally takes about a week to allocate the funds to our provider network. While the SCDOA gives the AAA's their best estimate of funds before the NGA's are distributed, the AAA's cannot issue contracts to our providers based on this estimate. The estimates prove useful in building our budgets prior to the official NGA being issued, but we are obligated to issue accurate funding information to our providers based on the NGA rather than a "best guess."

In previous testimony to this committee, comments arose such as "broken system," "contractors operating in the dark," and providers being referred to as "simply contractors." Unless the federal government can pass budgets in a more timely fashion, there is no way AAA's can issue contracts quicker. The Appalachian AAA issues MONTHLY budget updates to our provider network so that they are NOT operating in the dark. Several years ago, SCDOA instructed AAA's to determine if providers were sub-recipients or contractors. With much legal guidance, AAA's and COG's determined that our providers were contractors. That term has never meant to belittle the crucial role our providers play in serving our senior community. Entering a partnership with our contracted providers enabled the AAA's to utilize cash advances

to ensure the providers were being paid within 30 days of submitting their reimbursable expenses.

Our entire system is NOT broken! SCDOA, the AAA's, and the provider network serve tens of thousands of senior South Carolinians and their caregivers. We have overcome poor leadership (especially the 2012-2015 period), worked through the COVID pandemic, and are dealing with a rapidly growing senior population with limited funding, high inflation and a workforce shortage. Is there room for improvement? Absolutely, on ALL levels...including a very divisive federal government.

There are frustrations in our network. Some AAA's cannot spend the influx of additional dollars due to an array of factors. Other AAA's have the capacity to spend double what is allocated to them. It is the responsibility of SCDOA to monitor the capabilities of the ten AAA's. It is disturbing to those AAA's and providers who can utilize the funding appropriately to hear that SCDOA has NOT asked for an increase in funding for two years. We urge SCDOA to reallocate the unspent funds so that we are helping more South Carolinians thrive in their communities.

Communication is an area where SCDOA and some AAA's can do much better. The goal of SCDOA, AAA's, and the provider network is to improve the lives in our senior community. To achieve this goal, we must work together, listen to each other, and appreciate what we all do.

Connie Munn was appointed as Director to SCDOA in early 2020, right before the pandemic began. She is educated, experienced, and most importantly, has the passion to accomplish our goals. We need to give her time to address the issues brought up by the 2019 LAC report and those who have addressed this committee. We are headed in the right direction.

As president of the Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging (SE4A), I see and hear what our counterparts experience in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The South Carolina Aging network is ahead of the curve in the South. Yes, we can improve...and we strive to do so. Let's work together to make our world a better place!