



Tax & Budget

PROTECTING OLDER OHIOANS: INCREASING REPORTING, MAINTAINING SERVICES **WENDY PATTON**

Our rural areas, towns and cities are strengthened when aging Ohioans can stay connected to their communities. One component of this is ensuring safety and justice for our older neighbors and family members. Ohio's counties are charged with protecting citizens who are in danger of being, abused, exploited, neglected or abandoned. Adult protective services keep older Ohioans safe, enabling them to thrive and continue contributing to our communities.

Ohio's population is aging, increasing the need for adult protective services. Deregulation and increasingly complex financial products make elderly Ohioans targets for exploitation. The state underfunds protective services, leaving counties without enough to address growing needs. Better funding will make our communities more vibrant and inclusive.

The state provides \$1.2 billion less in flexible funding assistance to local government today than in 2010. Ohio boosted state investment for adult protective services since 2015, but not by enough. More resources will better ensure safety.

This issue brief reviews changes in adult protective services law and funding over the past five years. The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services recommended funding of \$10 million a year (\$20 million for the 2018-19 budget). Policy makers did not meet the request. We recommend about twice this much to protect the estimated 105,000 elderly Ohioans who are abused. This number is in the lower range of estimates - Attorney General Mike DeWine's Elder Justice Commission suggested it could be more like 220,000. Policy Matters recommends providing \$22.75 million a year to more fully meet Ohio's needs.

Since 2013, lawmakers have appropriated new funding for the adult protective service system, including \$10 million for system improvements in 2015 and \$2.7 million a year for services in the current budget. As a result, Ohio's county departments of job and family services were able to investigate 30 percent more reports of abuse and neglect of adult Ohioans in 2018 than in 2013. This solid increase is a victory. Ohio is beginning to build a solid protective system. Making it complete will take a significant additional investment.

Ohio could become a leader in elder justice by anticipating resources needed to respond to our new comprehensive reporting laws and appropriating sufficient funding in the upcoming budget.

Lawmakers should appropriate at a minimum \$22.75 million a year for adult protective services in the two-year 2020-21 budget. This will allow system capacity to be expanded and set the stage for deeper investment in subsequent years.

A state budget is about priorities and needs. This year, lawmakers should prioritize safety and protection for older Ohioans. Ensuring our oldest neighbors can continue to contribute and thrive is in all of our interests.