

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RETIREMENT, SECURITY AND AGING
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Good morning. I am Joyce Garver Keller, Executive Director of Ohio Jewish Communities. I want to thank Chairman DeWine, Ranking Member Mikulski, and the Senate Subcommittee on Retirement, Security and Aging for the invitation to participate in this hearing on understanding NORC supportive service programs and their potential for strengthening long-term care services for America's older adults. As this hearing coincides with the Subcommittee's consideration of Older Americans Act reauthorization, I commend you for the timeliness of today's hearing.

For 16 years, I have been the Executive Director of Ohio Jewish Communities, an organization dedicated to enhancing the Ohio Jewish community's ability to serve human needs, mainly through Ohio's network of Jewish Federations, and to engage Ohio's public officials in support of sound public policy. In this capacity, I am pleased to provide the Subcommittee with my perspective on Ohio's NORC programs.

The NORC movement in Ohio commenced specifically to assist seniors and aging baby boomers to better maintain their lifestyles and social support networks without having to move out of their neighborhoods. The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland has been in the forefront of seeking solutions to the looming crisis of caring for an ever-growing elderly population in Ohio. Today, Ohio is home to more than 1.5 million residents 65 years or over; having one of the largest concentrations of seniors in the country (ranks 14th). Community Options, established in 1997, is one of the first NORC programs based outside of New York State, is the first program established in Ohio, and is one of the founding Older Americans Act Title IV demonstration projects that were commenced in 2002.

Recognizing that loneliness and barriers to available services exist, Community Options was developed to better connect with seniors living independently and linking them to targeted community supports. The following are key factors to understanding the Community Options NORC Supportive Service model:

- The program is located in vertical NORC buildings at 5-sites in Cleveland's Mayfield Heights, University Heights, Beachwood, and Lyndhurst neighborhoods, and serves approximately 700 residents a year.
- The typical NORC resident served by the program is female, widowed, in her early 80's, and has resided in her home for more than a decade.
- The program serves a diversity of ethnic and religious groups, including Eastern European Jews, African Americans, Italians, Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews.
- Community Options is structured around Community Organizing and Senior Empowerment. The seniors direct the program through advisory councils, volunteerism, cost-sharing for the activities they participate in, and social service selection through a large referral system (a data base of more than 1,400 providers is constantly monitored and maintained). Resource coordinators ensure a community infrastructure is in place through the development of partnerships with landlords, vendors, residents, and community service providers in many areas. Services and activities focus on health and wellness, education, recreation, and transportation. The coordinators maintain a regular presence in the buildings and are recognized by the residents as the first line of support and only a phone call away. Unlike a housing complex with an employed service coordinator, the service activity developed by Community Options is consumer driven and based upon individual self-determined need and preference.
- The program operates on an annual budget of approximately \$200 thousand dollars from income derived from the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland allocations (from its annual Campaign for Human Needs), other charitable contributions, landlords, activities fees, and federal grants.

The seniors served by Community Options remain active, engaged, and living at home longer. In 2004, the program was evaluated by Dr. Georgia Anetzberger, a renowned expert in the field of gerontology. Dr. Anetzberger's research found that as a result of Community Options, participants are better able to control their lives and access assistance and activities; they are more connected to their neighbors; and they feel that they have choices and are able to live independently with self-confidence. In her report, Dr. Anetzberger wrote that Community Options fosters caring communities in which individual choice-making is promoted and encourages seniors to thrive.

In 2002, Community Options used its Older Americans Act Title IV demonstration grant to test the replicability of its NORC model in different Ohio regions. Through an RFP process four recipients were selected for the demonstration, including the Area Agency on Aging in Canton; Jewish Family Service, Cincinnati; Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, Cleveland; and Wexner Heritage Village, Columbus (a continuum of care campus with a 200 bed skilled nursing facility; two group homes for adults with developmental disabilities and mental retardation; subsidized housing for 164 seniors; hospice care and end-of-life programming; senior transportation; and other supportive services programming). The four agencies launched 13 program sites among them, and adhered to the consumer-directed community-building empowerment model developed by Community Options.

Internationally recognized Dr. Eva Kahana, Ph.D., director of the Elderly Care Research Center of Case Western Reserve University, was contracted to assess the emerging programs within the demonstration project. Her report, "*Effects of Service Options Program in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities*," articulated four central findings:

- "Results support the value of the Community Options Program philosophy to give older adults a greater say in services to be marshaled."
- "Significant improvements in reporting quality of life for residents of housing sites with newly instituted service and activity programs."

- “Researchers propose that for populations with compromised access to basic services, tools should be developed that embrace a community model of empowerment rather than a clinical model of standardized assessments to determine comprehensive social and medical needs.”
- “Community Options program has successfully developed social capital in the community by providing infrastructure to address the needs of community dwelling elders.”

Although the four participating agencies were able to successfully initiate programs, future sustainability of the NORC demonstrations became a significant challenge, and only two of the programs – Cincinnati Jewish Family Service and Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging were able to obtain funding beyond the grant period to continue operations of their respective programs. Cleveland’s Community Options, whose federal grants (HUD and AoA) will soon be finished, is in the process of assessing how it will address the funding shortfall of approximately \$50,000, annually, once these grant resources are terminated.

While the Canton program could not continue, the experience provided an opportunity for the AAA to strategically target existing programs and resources in NORC locations and found that as a result of the demonstration, residents are more connected to the available community-based services in the area. The Columbus agency was the only one of the four that chose to test the model in a horizontal setting – garden-style apartments. The visible impact of the program took longer to achieve than the others, and, as a result, it was found that the landlords did not have a sufficient time to become engaged in the program and receptive to a long-term commitment. Should a favorable funding environment emerge, Wexner Heritage Village would pursue reestablishing the program.

Retaining the familiarity of home remains an utmost priority of older adults. Yet for many seniors, living alone with limited mobility and difficulty in accessing socialization, companionship, and services, becomes a major challenge to their quality of life and independence. The Community Options NORC Supportive Service Program provides on-site activities, access to social service referrals, wellness activities, and community

building. The relationships developed through its resource coordinators enable seniors to trust, more quickly learn about, and utilize community resources. Community Option's demonstration project found that replicability was possible, but sustainability was a significant challenge to fledgling programs. As supported by the findings of Drs. Anetzberger and Kahana, communities with high concentrations of older adults could gain tremendously if Congress were to establish a national NORC supportive service program through the Older Americans Act reauthorization process.

On behalf of Ohio Jewish Communities, I want to thank the Subcommittee for acknowledging the growing interest in NORC supportive service programs, and for holding this hearing within the context of the Older Americans Act reauthorization. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.