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Testimony in support of HB 5020

Joint Subcommittee on Human Services

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AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With over 500,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial resilience and livable communities.

We are pleased to support HB 5020. While we know that most Oregonians want to remain in community and age in place, that is not possible for some of our most vulnerable older Oregonians and they must rely on long term supports and services, including residing in long term care facilities.

The role of the state is to make sure we not only honor independence, choice, dignity, autonomy and privacy of Oregonians living in long term care facilities, we need to fully support systems that provide critical safeguards and protections.

We are here today in support of the critical work provided by the Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) office to protect Oregonians. We fully support appropriating needed funds to fully staff LTCO programs. In addition, we want to call out our specific support of the permanent funding of 5 new positions for the Office of Public Guardian.

The LTCO program improves residents' care and quality of life and protects residents' rights including through responding to complaints and advocating for residents. However, across the country, we have seen ombudsman programs chronically under-funded. They sometimes lack the staff and resources to respond promptly to all complaints or to visit facilities on a regular basis. Although ombudsmen do not have the authority to enforce laws and regulations, they are often the first to identify problems and compliance issues when they are able to regularly visit care settings.

Oregon does well but we can always do better. Currently Oregon is effectively at one full-time equivalent paid ombudsman for every 4,500 licensed LTTS beds. AARP believes this should be reduced by more than half to one paid ombudsman for every 2,000 licensed beds.

As this committee evaluates and funds many critical services and programs for Oregonians, we want to make sure that our LTCO programs are fully funded and able to provide the critical protections to our most vulnerable members of society.