

Rep. Tangretti

Supplemental Remarks

AARP, May 11, 1994

(NOTE TO TOM: The following paragraphs on local tax reform are basically verbatim comments from Bob Kassaway of Fred Trello's Finance Committee staff.)

In subsequent action, after the House passed the bill, the Senate Finance Committee, then under Democratic control, performed major surgery on the bill.

They essentially gutted the House version (H.B. 2202) and substituted an alternative version identified with Senator Mike

Dawida of Allegheny County.

By comparison, the Dawida plan is considered a more complicated proposal, less straightforward than the bill the House passed.

However, when the balance of power shifted in the Senate to the Republicans, newly appointed chairwoman Melissa Hart of Allegheny County scheduled and held a series of public hearings on the tax reform issue, and the information that is now filtering back from the Senate suggests a likelihood that something closer to House Bill 2202 will become the foundation for the plan that will eventually move in the Senate.

At the present time, the situation with respect to local tax reform is very fluid, and there still exists plenty of opportunity for groups like AARP and other interested parties to offer input that may shape the eventual plan. Nothing is set in stone at this point.

However, the underlying policy goal remains that of shifting the local tax burden from property taxes to other revenue sources that are more reliable measures of an individual's ability to pay.

Additionally, there remains a commitment to provide for local referenda to obtain voter approval of any proposed tax changes so that

the public will have the final say on the tax reform issue.

Other bills that would be of interest to AARP members include:

A bill passed by the House just last month, House Bill 413, which would help consumers make more informed decisions when choosing a nursing home facility for themselves or a loved one.

The bill would require that Pennsylvania nursing home operators make available to the public information on staffing levels, use of temporary staff, staff tenure, license history, information about whether or not the facility is

public or private, for-profit or non-profit, and a list of the services available at the home.

The data would be reported to the Departments of Health and Aging and would be compiled in an annual Nursing Home Consumer Information Guide which, along with a toll-free telephone "hotline," would enable individuals to obtain useful and informative descriptions of each nursing home in the state, including any deficiencies or violations associated with the facilities.

Also related to care in nursing homes, or the lack of it, House Bill 2477 would create criminal penalties for caretakers who harm

patients by failing to provide necessary care.

Currently there are no criminal penalties attached to acts of omission with the result that nursing home patients are exposed to injury through neglectful conduct by caretakers. The bill was approved by the House Aging and Youth Committee and forwarded to the Appropriations Committee for study of its fiscal impact.

House Bill 2733 has recently been introduced by Rep. Kevin Blaum, chairman of the Aging and Youth Committee. The bill would expand income eligibility limits for the PACE prescription program by \$1,000 -- making it

\$14,000 for single individuals and \$17,200 for married couples.

*What do
I know - consider
my bill - any
future SS increase*

Along those lines, I've introduced a bill to exclude increases in Social Security income in determining eligibility for the full range of senior citizen benefits offered by the state, including PACE, Property Tax and Rent Rebates and transportation assistance.

Another bill I've introduced, thanks to a suggestion from your organization, is a bill to create a Keystone Card for Pennsylvania senior citizens similar to a program in Ohio that enables cardholders to qualify for special discounts on goods and services offered by

participating merchants.

*Accepts approval
put us lists -*

The House of Representatives is also looking at the establishment of standards, perhaps including state certification and licensing, for home health care agencies.

*What do
we want to
include?*

These are privately run services that provide in-home visitation by people who assist their clients with medications and home treatments or provide services such as housework and preparation of meals.

Also on the horizon, at least in the process of examination, is the possibility of strengthening some of the powers of nursing home ombudsmen.

These are state service providers, operating out of the local Area Agencies on Aging, who monitor the services provided by nursing homes, act as mediators in disputes between nursing home operators and patients or their families, and see to it that patients are receiving adequate and appropriate care. A main concern will be whether the ombudsmen need additional enforcement powers to accomplish their tasks.