



Advocacy Committee January 16, 2024

Advocacy Committee members convened virtually and in-person on January 16, 2024. Members and attendees joined the virtual meeting by video conference and conference call and the in-person location was held at Independence First.

Members Present:

Chair Brian Peters, Commissioner
Sopheya Farrell
Gary Mikolajczyk

Staff Present:

Michelle Allison, DHHS
Jill Knight, DHHS
Migdalia Pacheco, DHHS
Ortriallya Paris, DHHS
Emily Petersen, DHHS
Mary Proctor Brown, DHHS
Kayla Steinke, DHHS
Nina Yang, DHHS
Clare O'Brien, DHHS

Members Excused:

Maureen Fitzgerald
John Griffith
Trina Koch
Harold Oemig
Supervisor Sequanna Taylor

Attendees from the Public:

Commissioner George Banda
Maureen Conrad
Jill Kenehan-Krey, ASL Interpreter
Derrick Cainion, ASL Interpreter

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Brian Peters called the Advocacy Committee meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Ortriallya Paris, Clerical Assistant, DHHS, ADS, Aging Unit called the roll. A quorum was present.

II. Review and Approval of the Monday, October 9, 2023, and Monday, November 6, 2023, Advocacy Committee meeting minutes:

MOTION: Member Mikolajczyk moved to accept the October 9, 2023, Advocacy Committee meeting minutes.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajczyk moved, Peters second.)

III. ROUND ROBIN INTRODUCTIONS:

- Name-Gary Mikolajczyk
- Organization-UWA Retiree and former Commissioner
- How you came to join the Committee and how long you have been a member? Gary is a former Commissioner on the Commission on Aging. He served two terms. He now serves on the Advocacy Committee.

- Name-Sopheya Farrell
- Organization-Works at Easter Seals as a guardianship supervisor.
- How you came to join the Committee and how long you have been a member? Sopheya joined the Advocacy Committee in 2021.

- Name-Brian Peters
- Organization-Independence First
- How you came to join the Committee and how long you have been a member? Brian is a first-term Commissioner on the Commission on Aging and was appointed Chair of the Advocacy Committee in December.

IV. ELECTION OF ADVOCACY COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIR

Chair Peters is seeking nominations for a new vice-chair of the Advocacy Committee. Individuals can self-nominate or nominate someone else. If there is more than one candidate for Vice Chair, we will hold a closed voting process. If there is only one candidate running, we will vote by unanimous consent. Emily Petersen, Advocacy and Policy Manager, DHHS, ADS, Aging Unit suggested that the election of the Committee Vice-Chair could be laid over to the next meeting given the low attendance. Chair Peters agreed that this may be the best course of action and asked if anyone would be willing to make the motion.

MOTION: Member Mikolajczyk moved to lay over the election of vice-chair to the February Advocacy Committee meeting.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajczyk moved, Peters second.)

V. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

a) Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) State Aging Advocacy Day-Save the Date: Emily asked committee members to save the date of Tuesday May 14, 2024, for WAAN's Aging Advocacy Day. This will be an opportunity to travel to Madison and meet with your state legislator about issues related to aging. Emily stated that she will send a follow up email with a survey to gauge your availability for Aging Advocacy Day. If anyone is interested in attending, we will coordinate the transportation.

b) Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Disability Advisory Committee Meeting on January 30, 2024: Emily stated that the FCC Disability Advisory Committee would be holding a meeting at the end of

January to discuss recommendations for internet audio description file transmission and best practices for using artificial intelligence to caption live video programming. Emily will send the agenda and link to attend the meeting members.

VI. UPDATE ON ACTION ITEMS

- a) **Older Americans Act Funding Advocacy Letter:** Emily stated the letter presented to the Committee last year regarding Older Americans Act funding was transmitted to Milwaukee County's federal Congressional delegation and is attached to the agenda. Because the federal budget for 2024 has not been finalized and the funding for programs and services is undetermined, this request is still important. You can use the letter as an outline to email members of Congress at the federal level.
- b) **Comment on changes to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:** Emily stated that the proposed comments related to this regulation were submitted as guided by the Committee. The final comment is attached.
- c) **Milwaukee County 2024 Adopted Budget:** Emily stated that the 2024 Milwaukee County Adopted Budget was passed in November and included additional funding for Aging and Disabilities Services. The County Executive and County Board amended the budget to increase funding in alignment with the request from the Advocacy Committee. The Commission on Aging elected to spend those additional funds for an LGBT long-term care training project in collaboration with SAGE, additional funding for specialized transportation, senior centers, food security, and wellness.

VII. LEGISLATIVE & POLICY UPDATES

- a) **Federal Aging Policy**
 - i. **Federal Budget & Issues:** The 2024 federal budget is still underway. They recently adopted another continuing resolution, giving them about a month and half longer to work. Funding for Older American Act programs and services is still up for negotiation. To prioritize funding, Emily encouraged the committee to send a message to your congressional representatives, personalized with a story about how it impacts you. If an agreement cannot be reached, funding could stay level with 2022 or 2023 levels or cuts could be considered. At the same time, federal budget discussions are getting tied up with other bills to fund border changes or international conflicts. These things could impact what is adopted overall.
 - 1) **Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) Funding Updates:** Emily discussed the elimination of the MIPPA program. MIPPA funding is

crucial and supports our elder benefits program, Medicare outreach programs, and access to programs for low-income seniors. However, during budget negotiations, the program was cut in 2024. Our federal partners at USAging have been advocating on behalf of this program to legislators and we have sent a letter to our representatives in coordination. Without MIPPA funding, we will face significant challenges in providing Medicare outreach and counseling support to older adults in Milwaukee County. Action is needed to continue asking that discussions on funding this program open again.

b) State Legislative Issues

i. State Budget & Legislation

- 1) SB-407 Healthy Aging Grants (update from last meeting).** Emily discussed updates on SB-407, which relates to healthy aging grants. Emily noted that there is a hearing scheduled on this bill for tomorrow. Healthy aging grants will fund wellness programs, which otherwise receive little funding from the state and federal government. Because the hearing is tomorrow, timing is critical to reach out on this bill.
- 2) AB-572 Absentee Voting in Residential Care Facilities (update from last meeting).** Emily provided an update on AB-572, which aims to address absentee voting in residential care facilities. The bill alerts a resident's listed contacts that a special voting deputy would be present at a residential care facility and would alert them that they planned to fill out an absentee ballot. However, the bill lacks an option to opt out or choose which contacts to be alerted. This has led to opposition from various parties. A vote is not scheduled yet on the bill but could be soon.
- 3) SB-856 ADRC Specialized Transportation Pilot Program:** This bill would create a new specialized transportation pilot program operated by ADRCs in the state. The pilot would start with three regions, including a Southeast pilot region of which the Milwaukee County ADRC would take part. Specialized transportation programs are meant for older adults and individuals with disabilities. In this pilot, ADRCs can use state and federal specialized transportation funding, such as 85.21 funds and mobility manager funds, and other sorts of specialized transportation funds to either contract with or in-house run specialized transportation programs. However, no new funding would be allocated to build the pilot and it is not yet clear how current funding streams would be reallocated.

4) AB-578 Financial Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults:

This bill aims to provide financial protections for older adults. It would allow financial service providers, such as banks or credit unions, to refuse or delay services when they suspect financial exploitation of vulnerable individuals. The financial institute would not need to consult with an Adult Protective Service agency to decide and would not need to take into account any recommendation from an APS agency. Under this bill, a financial institution would also be permitted to ignore any Power of Attorney document if they believe it was being used to further any financial exploitation. This bill is of concern because it takes away the autonomy of older adults and allows financial institutions to make judgments, they are unqualified to make. Chair Peters spoke out in opposition of the bill and suggested that an official communication be sent from the Commission on Aging to legislators stating so.

MOTION: Member Mikolajaczyk moved to oppose AB-578 and requested a communication be sent to legislators based on the Committee's discussion.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajaczyk moved, Peters second).

5) AB-556 Elder Victim Crime Provisions: AB-556 relates to expediting criminal proceedings when the victim or witness in the case is an elder person. It also would preserve the testimony provided by a crime victim or witness if they are an elder person for use during a trial or hearing.

ii. **Administrative Rules & Governor's Tasks Forces.** There are no updates.

c) Milwaukee County Legislative Issues

i. Emily stated that she is available to answer any further questions or discuss specific legislative items related to Milwaukee County. Otherwise, there are no other updates.

VIII. 2024 POLICY PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

Emily explained the policy priorities document to the Committee. Each year, the Advocacy Committee develops policy priorities for the Commission on Aging to review. The Commission will make the final determination on the annual policy priorities. The 2023 Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Policy Priorities

document was shared in advance of the meeting with the group for review and discussion. The document is typically finalized by the end of February. The Committee will focus on the big picture policies to address, and Emily will backfill the remainder of the document with the explanations. Committee members were experiencing technical difficulties, which made discussion on the document difficult. Additionally, few Committee members were present. There was little discussion as to what should be removed or added. Emily recommended laying the item over until the next month when more Committee members were present. Peters has requested that Policy Priorities document be sent out an email.

IX. DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

Emily provided three potential action items for the Committee to review. They are all potential opportunities to provide comment. However, because Committee attendance is low and members are having difficulties providing feedback due to technical difficulties, Emily suggested that they be laid over to the next meeting. Chair Peters suggested discussing the comment that would be due most urgently: changes to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Medicaid Standards for Certified 1-2 Bed Adult Family Homes. Comments are due on January 31, 2024. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has released a new set of standards for these adult care facilities, which are considered one to two bed adult family homes. These facilities often do not receive the same level of oversight as larger facilities and can be less regulated. Individuals are also less likely to make complaints about these facilities for fear of retaliation; it is often easy to identify a complainant due to low census or the home is run by a relative or caregiver. Emily circulated the materials prior to the meeting.

MOTION: Mikolajczyk moved that the committee draft a comment in support of increased regulations on for 1-2 bed adult family homes.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajczyk moved, Farrell second).

X. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Chair Peters moved adjournment of the meeting at 10:24 a.m.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Peters moved, Farrell second).

Respectfully submitted,

Ortrialla Paris
Clerical Assistant 1