

Testimony to Committee on Health Equity, Human Needs and Strategic Planning, June 12, 2025
Janice Wilberg, Ph.D., Chair, Milwaukee County Commission on Aging

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. The Commission on Aging enthusiastically supports the proposed McGovern Senior Center/Senior Housing Project. It reflects the groundbreaking MKE Hubs report recommendations presented to the County Board last year and included in the 2025-2027 Area Aging Plan. **Three points:**

First, there are 190,000 older adults in Milwaukee County. Senior centers offer connection, education, recreation, and resources to reduce the devastating impact of social isolation and loneliness on health and mortality. Senior centers are places of health and joy but we need to get more people in the door. To achieve the enormous potential for senior centers to elevate older adults' well-being requires investment in buildings, programming, and outreach.

Second, McGovern Senior Center is very popular which is why the Commission is so committed to saving it. In this case, that means building a new center because the current building is old, never intended to be a senior center, and falling apart. Seniors deserve better. We have 154 parks, 15,200 acres + 215 miles of trail. The new McGovern would be built on the current site's footprint – basically 5 acres. Surely, older adults are worth that much.

Third, Milwaukee has a crushing need for housing. Data presented by Age Friendly Milwaukee County indicates that we need 40,000 units renting at \$650 or less per month. (U.S. Census). Meanwhile, 52% of older adults live alone on one income. The scarcity of affordable housing won't solve itself. Using tax credits and the federal earmark, we can address this need *and* build a new senior center at no cost to the County.

Nothing changes if nothing changes. The status quo is an insult to older adults. This is our moment to create a new paradigm for older adults in Milwaukee County. **Thank you.**