

April 14, 2025

Dear Representative/Senator [Name],

On behalf of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging, we are writing to express concern about the recent reorganization of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the potential negative impacts on the older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers whom we serve daily.

The Commission on Aging represents more than 190,000 older adults in Milwaukee County. Our older adult residents are more likely to live alone than the general population, more likely to have a disability, and more likely to be a non-driver. They rely upon the programs and services provided via the Milwaukee County Area Agency on Aging to live independently, sustain their health and wellness, and participate in their community. These services, such as congregate and home-delivered meals, transportation, caregiver support, and evidence-based wellness programs, are tailored to meet the unique needs of Milwaukee County's residents based on community feedback.

To deliver these essential services in our community, we rely upon a bedrock of federal funding through the Older Americans Act (OAA). We are concerned that the HHS agency responsible for supporting and funding our local work, the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), has been dismantled and its staff halved.

With uncertainty surrounding the status of the 10 regional ACL administrator jobs, who will provide technical assistance and guidance needed to ensure proper administration of OAA programs by our AAA and state agency? With the budget staff gone, how will this affect the distribution of OAA funding to states? Any interruption or delay in this funding will create swift hardship on our agency and our community providers, followed by risks to the health, wellness and independence of the older adults and caregivers we support every day.

Our nation is aging at a historic rate and doing so rapidly; the same is true in Milwaukee County. We cannot afford to reduce access to any aging services or destabilize community efforts to support older Americans. Any reduction in access would ultimately create situations in which older Americans are hungrier, less healthy, less safe and less independent—and their family caregivers are more burdened and stressed.

While we hope our worst fears are unfounded, we wanted to draw your attention to these major changes and how they may affect your constituents who benefit from these critical in-home, nutrition, transportation, case management, and caregiver supports. It is also difficult to plan and prepare for any proposed changes when communication is unclear. We are initially informed that staff is reduced, and programs moved, but later learn that they are re-hired, and programs are not impacted. With this confusion, we cannot navigate a pathway forward that successfully prioritizes the needs of our older adults.

If you can provide any additional information on how the changes at HHS may affect our ability to successfully plan, develop and deliver OAA and other federally supported aging services, we would appreciate your response.

Please reach out if we can provide any additional information about this topic. Thank you for your support of this request.

Sincerely,

Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.
Chair
Commission on Aging

Brian Peters
Legislative Advocacy Officer
Commission on Aging