



MILWAUKEE COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
& HUMAN SERVICES

**AGING & DISABILITIES  
SERVICES**

## **ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING MIUTES APRIL 11, 2025**

The Milwaukee County Aging Advocacy Committee convened in person at the Washington Park Senior Center on Friday, April 11, 2025. Members and attendees also joined the meeting virtually and by conference call.

### **Members Present:**

Commissioner Brian Peters, *Chair*  
Commissioner George Banda, *Vice-Chair*  
Maureen Conrad  
Gary Mikolajczyk  
Paulette Maclin  
Sopheya Farrell  
Commissioner Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.  
Trina Koch

### **Members Excused:**

Supervisor Sequanna Taylor, *Commissioner*

William Meunier

### **Members Excused Continued...**

Harold Oemig

### **Milwaukee County Staff**

Vonda Nyang, *DHHS*  
Emily Petersen, *DHHS*

### **Attendees from the Public**

Kimberly King  
Rene Smith  
Derrick Cainion, *ASL Interpreter*  
Stephanie Zito, *ASL Interpreter*

## **MINUTES**

### **I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Chair Brian Peters called the meeting to order at 1:09 p.m. Emily Petersen, AAA Advocacy and Policy Manager, took the roll call. A quorum was not present, so the committee decided to discuss non-action items until it reached a quorum.

### **II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 7, 2025, ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

MOTION: To approve the March 7, 2025, Advocacy Committee meeting minutes

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajczyk Moved, Conrad Second)

### **III. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES**

- A. The 2025 Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) Aging Advocacy Day:** The Aging Advocacy Day is scheduled for May 13, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Madison, WI. Emily Petersen, the AAA Advocacy and Policy Manager,

coordinates transportation for committee members interested in attending the event. She encourages all committee members to register and reminds them that participants from the Senior Leadership program will join them at the event. (See the attached flyer for more details.)

- B. Milwaukee County Advisory Council Recruitment:** The Advisory Council seeks older advocates with specific expertise in healthcare provision, veteran services, family caregiving, etc. Ms. Petersen included a recruitment flyer in the packet and encouraged members of the Advocacy Committee to assist with this initiative (see the attached flyer).

**Social Security Event:** COA Chair Janice Wilberg introduced an event organized by the Commission in partnership with AARP. The event aims to send collected stories from attendees to send to their congressional delegation to empower individuals to voice their concerns regarding recent changes to Social Security policies and reorganization plans within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The event emphasized the importance of legislative contact and advocacy on issues that affect older adults.

#### IV. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICE UPDATES

##### A. Federal Aging Policy

##### I. Federal Budget and Issues

- a. **Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Final Status Update:** Advocacy and Policy Manager Ms. Petersen discussed the summary in the packet, which explained the developments regarding the federal budget proceedings for 2025. A continuing resolution was adopted to fund the budget until the end of the fiscal year, September 30, 2025, specifically for Older Americans Act programs and services, including nutrition, supportive services, evidence-based wellness programs, and MIPPA (Medicare Outreach Program). The fiscal budget season runs **from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025.**
- b. **Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Status Update:** In the 2026 federal budget update, Congress is engaged in budget reconciliation to set spending guidelines for a 10-year plan targeting Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security. The House and Senate have passed budget resolutions, but their spending targets differ significantly. The House has proposed cuts exceeding one trillion dollars, while the Senate has suggested only a few million dollars. Ms. Petersen stressed the importance of further efforts to address the proposed reductions.
- c. **Social Security Changes/Updates:** Ms. Petersen led the discussion on recent changes and updates in the Social Security arena. She addressed the reversal of plans to close offices and reduce staff and the new policy that mandates in-person visits for making account

changes. Additionally, she highlighted the ongoing budget reconciliation process and the possibility of further cuts. Ms. Petersen also recommended contacting the Wisconsin Attorney General's office to learn more about their plans for receiving complaints regarding Social Security, like the approach taken in Arizona.

- d. **Debrief US Aging Policy Briefing:** The committee discussed the Wisconsin group's experience at the US Aging Policy Convention. USAging is the national partner that advocates for federal policies related to aging. They host an annual policy briefing to review federal aging issues and provide advocacy alerts about current developments at the federal level, including budget matters and legislation affecting older adults.

The discussion emphasized the importance of legislative outreach and advocacy on federal aging issues. Today's packet includes copies of the information shared at today's meeting. One highlighted item is the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, which was delayed due to budgetary concerns. Additionally, there is a recognized need for legislative staff to understand the Older Americans Act, and there is potential for a training session on this topic.

- e. **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Reorganization and Staff Reductions:** The Advocacy Committee discussed the recent reorganization and staff reductions at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and a related legal action. The committee highlighted DHHS's plan to reduce its workforce by 20,000, consolidate divisions, and close regional offices. The reorganization is expected to significantly impact older adults in Milwaukee County and individuals with disabilities, as many regional offices have been dismantled and staff have been laid off.

Additionally, the Administration for Community Living oversees aging programs and services, which will be divided among various agencies within DHHS. Policy Manager Petersen pointed out that this split would likely lead to a regional and divisional staff shortage, adversely affecting local communities. There is also uncertainty regarding where the funds will be allocated and grant funding itself. The Advocacy Committee voted to communicate these issues to their representative in response to these concerns.

**MOTION:** To have staff (Emily Petersen) draft a letter on behalf of the Commission expressing concerns about the recent reorganization of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the impacts on older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers.

**ACTION:** Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Mikolajczyk Moved, Banda Second)

## II. Federal Regulations and Executive Orders

- a. **EO Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy:** The committee discussed the Executive Order issued by the President to continue reducing the size of the Federal Government through staff reductions and reductions in the type of work that the administration will focus on. In particular, the committee focused on a portion of the Order that included an end to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, discussed below.
  - i. **Ending the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness:** Chair Peters expressed concern over President Trump's decision to close federal agencies and task forces, including the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. He fears that these program cuts will lead to an increase in homelessness. Additionally, the number of older adults among the unhoused population is rising rapidly.

## B. State Legislative Issues

### I. State Budget & Legislation

- a. **Joint Finance Committee Public Hearing – Recap April 4 Hearing:** A few of the Advocacy Members attended and provided testimony. Chair Wilberg testified as well and spoke in support of home-delivered meals and transportation.

Chair Peters recounted his experience at a recent town hall meeting, where he and others provided testimony on essential issues such as home-delivered meals and transportation. He noted that the legislators present were attentive and took notes, particularly on issues discussed for the first time. He emphasized the significance of attending these meetings to ensure their voices are heard. Advocacy and Policy Manager Petersen has also prepared a draft testimony that others can use and customize. WAAN's Aging Advocacy Day in May is essential for direct, one-on-one communication with legislators.

## II. Administrative Rules & Governor's Taskforces

## C. Milwaukee County Legislative Issues

### I. Milwaukee County Budget and Legislation

### II. Aging Items of Interest

- Chair Wilberg led the discussion on the potential development of a new McGovern Senior Center. The proposal includes a mixed-use

development featuring a larger senior center on the first floor and a library and housing on the upper floors. Congresswoman Gwen Moore secured a \$2 million earmarked for this project in Milwaukee County. The Parks Committee, chaired by Supervisor Wasserman, will play a crucial role in the decision-making process.

- Upcoming advocacy opportunities, including virtual meetings and town hall gatherings with legislators, were discussed. Mr. Petersen informed the Committee about his tour of the new Coggs building and expressed hope that it will open soon.

## **V. 2025-2027 AGING AREA PLAN ADVOCACY GOALS REVIEW**

The Advocacy Committee reviewed the progress of the Area Aging Plan Goals and highlighted the success of building relationships with local, state, and federal legislators. The Policy Manager identified three specific policy proposals and noted the ongoing partnership with AARP for advocacy events. It emphasized the need to create an action plan to advocate these proposals and recruit more members for the Advocacy Committee. Additionally, the committee discussed targeting legislators based on their committee assignments and the potential impact of a bill that requires Medicaid recipients to renew their eligibility twice a year. There was also a suggestion to use vacation home addresses to communicate with representatives regarding their issues. For the next meeting, Advocacy and Policy Manager Petersen will create a list of the committees that our legislators are on so we can work on building relationships.

## **VI. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION: To adjourn

ACTION: Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Banda Moved, Peters Second)

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m. The next Advocacy Committee meeting will be at 9 a.m. on Friday, May 2, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Vonda Nyang  
Executive Assistant