



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
& HUMAN SERVICES
**AGING & DISABILITIES
SERVICES**

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING APRIL 23, 2024

The Milwaukee County Aging Advocacy Committee convened in-person on Tuesday, April 23, 2024, at Wilson Park Senior Center, 2601 W. Howard Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53221. Members and attendees joined the meeting in-person and virtually.

Members Present:

Commissioner Brian Peters, *Chair*
Harold Oemig, *Vice-Chair*
Commissioner George Banda
Maureen Conrad
Sopheya Farrell
Trina Koch
Gary Mikolajczyk
William Meunier

Members Excused:

John Griffith
County Supervisor Sequanna Taylor

Milwaukee County Staff

Matt Fortman, *DHHS*
Jill Knight, *DHHS*

Milwaukee County Staff Continued...

Bailey Knutson, *DHHS*
Vonda Nyang, *DHHS*
Clare O'Brien, *DHHS*
Ortrialla Paris, *DHHS*
Emily Petersen, *DHHS*
Nina Yang, *DHHS*

Attendees from the Public

Commissioner Janice Wilberg
Joe Crivello
Jill Kenehen-Krey, *ASL Interpreter*
Rene Smith
Tom Suchecki, *Wellness Committee*
Paul Truess, *Senator Ron Johnson's Office*
Sherrie Tussler, *Hunger Task Force*
Steph Zito, *ASL Interpreter*

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Brian Peters called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. Emily Petersen, AAA Advocacy and Policy Manager, took the roll call; A quorum was present.

II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 19, 2024, ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: To approve the March 19, 2024, Advocacy Committee meeting minutes.

ACTION: Motion prevailed by seven, one abstained (Conrad Moved, Mikolajczyk Second).

Vice-Chair Oemig requested that the meeting minutes be amended to include a discussion of public hearings. The Advocacy Committee scheduled four public hearings, but none occurred on Milwaukee's West Side. Mr. Oemig requested that future public hearings include a hearing for the West Side of Milwaukee.

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) State Aging Advocacy Day (Save the Date!): Chair Peters reminded committee members that the State Aging Advocacy Day is May 14, 2024. He strongly encouraged everyone to attend as it's a beautiful opportunity to meet and talk with their legislators. If you plan to attend, there is a survey you must fill out so County staff can plan appropriately for the number of people attending. Ms. Petersen informed members that she has yet to determine the final number of attendees for the trip, so she can't tell the committee the type of transportation for the journey. Last year, there were a few attendees, so carpools were the transportation. If the attendance numbers are large enough this year, Ms. Petersen will rent a bus; however, the attendance will determine the bus type she will rent. Also, Ms. Petersen will choose a central location where everyone will meet to board transportation for the trip, depending on the attendee's home location.

2024 Senior Leadership Program: The Chair is thrilled to announce the Senior Leadership program, a fantastic opportunity for Milwaukee County's older adults. Scheduled from May 22, 2024, to May 24, 2024, this program is open to all. If you know of someone who would be a great fit, we urge you to encourage them to sign up. For more information, please see the flyer that Ms. Petersen emailed everyone for today's meeting packet.

Three committee members, Maureen Conrad, Trina Koch, and Gary Mikolajczyk shared their experiences while attending previous Senior Leadership programs. A few of the comments were:

- We learned about the different levels of government
- We met many people and created relationships
- I became a commissioner after finishing the program and have been an advocate ever since

2024 In-District Advocacy Day: Emily Petersen, AAA Advocacy and Policy Manager, provided information on the 2024 In-District Advocacy Day. This event is like the WAAN State Aging Advocacy Day, except you would meet with your local legislators in your district at a regional location. WAAN is planning this event with its aging network partners. Ms. Petersen is on the WAAN leadership team and is assisting with planning the event's advocacy meetings.

Ms. Petersen informed the Advocacy Committee that the AAA and the Commission on Aging had planned a similar event titled "Meet the Commission on Aging," to which they had invited legislators from all levels of government. Aging Services had invited other senior commissions to participate. The Commission is considering having another event planned for June of this year. More details will come, including a save-the-date for the event.

IV. UPDATE ON ACTION ITEMS

a) & b) Communication regarding S. 1670/H.R.3321 Credit for Caring Act and S. 3565/H.R. 6929 Affordable Connectivity Program Extension: Ms.

Petersen provided an update on both bills. The Advocacy Committee and the Commission on Aging both adopted the bills of the policy platform earlier this year. In March, the Committee asked the Commission if it could send a formal letter informing legislators of the Advocacy Committee's position on both bills. Ms. Petersen provided a copy of the letter template for the Committee to review.

Vice-Chair Oemig had a few questions regarding the Credit for Caring Act bill. He wanted to know if the care provided, and financial responsibilities would be tax deductible from your income. No, it would be for items not tax deductible, so the Committee is asking to include them as tax credits. Examples given were respite care, caregiving expenses, medical supplies, etc. Currently, caregivers can't get tax deductions unless they are related to a person; this would allow caregivers who are not related to receive tax deductions. Vice-Chair Oemig asked how someone can claim tax deductions on someone without having some certification to prove that the caregiver indeed provided care to a person. After a lengthy discussion, the Chair mentioned that there are just some taxable items you don't need certification for, like mileage.

c) Communication on Senate Older American's Act Reauthorization Request for Information: Ms. Petersen reminded the Committee that the Senate

Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee requested information from the Aging Network regarding the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act, which was disclosed to her at the USAging Conference the week before needing to put together a response. A response was necessary as it was between the Advocacy Committee's meeting and the Commission on Aging, and Ms. Petersen had to send a response before discussing it with the Advocacy Committee. Ms. Petersen shared a copy of the response letter with the Committee for review. There were no questions.

d) Inclusion of Wisconsin State Park, Forest Recreations Area lifetime admission passes for older adults in Commission on Aging policy platform: Ms. Petersen provided the update. The Milwaukee County Board

voted and adopted the request for lifetime recreation passes for older adults, and the Advocacy Committee voted to add it to their policy plan to make it a priority. The full Commission on Aging voted to support this item, which passed. Committee member Mikolajczyk requested to have a letter sent to State representatives on this issue, and it was agreed that a letter could be sent if that is what the Advocacy Committee wants to communicate formally.

V. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICE UPDATES

a) **Federal Aging Policy (Federal Budget & Issues), Fiscal Year 2024**

Budget Status Updates: Ms. Petersen provided the last update on the 2024 budget. Congress adopted the DHHS budget, which includes the Administration for Community Living and funds Older Americans Act programs and services. Also, the congressionally directed spending process included several projects related to Milwaukee County. Not all projects are necessarily older adult related. So, the 2024 budget process is now closed, and the County is working on the 2025 budget process. She wanted to highlight that she paid close attention to the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and the funding for those programs and services.

b) **State Legislative Issues (State Budget and Legislation), Review State**

Legislation Tracker: The State legislature is out of session, so there's not much happening now. Ms. Petersen didn't provide the legislation tracker in the packet for this meeting. She mentioned one item to pay attention to for the next session: the healthcare decision-making issues/advance care planning. Wisconsin doesn't have a next-of-kin process like other states. There was an attempt to put one in place last year, but there was opposition against the bill across the state, so there was no movement on it. But it will be a high priority during the next session. Most people do not have a Power of Attorney (POA), Healthcare Power of Attorney (HPOW), or guardianship. There will be a few workshops next month on advanced planning, and she can send a flyer to the committee to obtain more information.

b) **State Legislative Issue: Emergency Food Assistant Program, Sherry**

Tessler, Chief Executive Officer for Hunger Task Force: The State is proposing changes to the Emergency Food Assistance Program that would alter the eligibility criteria for those receiving assistance through this program. Currently, the program benefits seniors, low-income individuals, immigrants, and anyone needing food assistance. During the pandemic, anyone could claim they were eligible with a signature. At the time, the Hunger Taskforce saw an increase of about five times more food for pantries and people needing food. Now that the pandemic is over, they are moving back to the old criteria for eligibility, which could create difficulties in receiving food assistance, which will affect the stock boxes, food pantries, and food programs. Ms. Tessler requests the Advocacy Committee to support Milwaukee County's older adults in the program.

MOTION: To write a letter to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services supporting the current program rules for the Emergency Food Assistance Program that require identification, residency, and proof of household size to receive assistance.

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

- c) **Milwaukee County Legislative Issues (Milwaukee County Budget & Legislation), Request form Commission on Aging to craft 2025 County Budget Policy Priorities, Matt Fortman, DHHS Chief Financial Officer (CFO):** CFO Fortman provided a PowerPoint that covered the 2025 County Operating Budget Process, 2024 Aging Service Funding, Short-Term ARPA Funding, Tax Levy Funding, and One-Time Tax Levy Fund with the Advocacy Committee. Mr. Fortman explained that the County is still trying to figure out how to fund Aging County services as many vendors are asking for contract increases, as staffing, food costs, and participants have increased. He enlightened the Committee on how aging services are funded and their funding resources. Chair Peters asked the Advocacy Committee if there were areas, they thought needed more funding and asked for their input. After a lengthy discussion about the population growth of the older adult community and its needs, Chair Peters asked Ms. Petersen to create a funding baseline for the next Advocacy Committee to review to see what areas might need an increase in funding.

VI. ASSIGNMENT OF CONSTITUENT AREA OF INTEREST

The Advocacy Committee did not discuss the Assignment of Constituent Areas of Interest at this meeting.

VII. POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

- a) **Older Americans Act Reauthorization priorities:** This item will be taken up at the next meeting.
- b) **2025 County Budget priorities:** This item was covered after the PowerPoint presentation provided by DHHS CFO Matt Fortman.

Advocacy Committee New Meeting Date: The Advocacy Committee discussed changing the dates and times of its meetings so they would have time to submit action items to the Executive Committee for consideration of the Full Commission's action on its Advocacy items. The Advocacy Committee agreed to move its meetings to the first Friday of every month, starting at 9 a.m.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT: MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:35 a.m.

MOTION: To adjourn

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

The next Advocacy Committee meeting will be Friday, May 3, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Vonda Nyang
Executive Assistant