



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Department on Aging

**Milwaukee County Commission on Aging
Advocacy Committee Meeting
April 6, 2020**

The Advocacy Committee held its monthly meeting on Monday, April 6, 2020, by teleconference. Attendance was taken verbally.

Members Present:

Commissioner Shirley Sharp, Chair
Commissioner George Pumphrey, Vice Chair
Commissioner Sharon Abston-Coleman
Barbara Bechtel
Maureen Conrad
Casper Green
John Griffith
David Hoffman
Elliot Moeser
Commissioner Cesar Pabon
Judy Troestler
Cindy Van Vreede

Commissioners Present:

Richmond Izard, Chair

Aging Council Members:

Debra Jupka
Sally Lindner
Patty Pagel

Staff Present:

Daniel Idzikowski, MCDA Program & Policy
Coordinator
Andy Bethke, MCDA Outreach Social Worker

MINUTES

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Shirley Sharp called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and invited all members to introduce themselves. The meeting was held by teleconference and recorded.

II. Review/Approval of March 2, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes

MOTION: Postpone action on the March 2, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes until May.

ACTION: Unanimously approved (Abston-Coleman, Bechtel).

III. Updates on COVID-19 Response

Idzikowski thanks everyone for attending this meeting and provides updates on MCDA work during the COVID-19 health emergency. All MCDA working remotely and fully engaged in responding to the crisis and ensuring service delivery to older adults in Milwaukee County. Outlines changes to meal distribution and dining programs – meal delivery or take out. OASIS, Beulah Britton & UCC not operating, but all others are distribution sites. Meals on Wheels and grocery shopping options available. Non-emergency medical transportation available. Calls being made to check on well being of about 6000 older adults by staff and vendors. SeniorCare now assisting with unemployment claims. Jewish Family Services has new mental health outreach.

Griffith asks about food pantries and reaching individuals in social isolation who do not have access to computers, particularly to folks with issues of mental illness. Idzikowski replies that Second Harvest and Hunger Task Force are maintaining food pantries and MCDA provides information on food availability. To combat social isolation, we have been calling folks and offering special counseling services through JFS. Griffith suggests using media outlets to encourage friends and neighbors to reach out.

Izard recommends allowing more time for Commissioners to speak. Asks what kind of feedback MCDA has been getting. Idzikowski notes that MCDA has been engaging with public through daily updates on website, FaceBook page, and periodic e-news. Apologizes that this is the first opportunity to convene the Commission members. Notes that Schmitt has reached out to media and there have been a number of positive stories in the news. Response has been very positive.

Jupka responds that senior center directors have reported that numbers declined in first week, but have increased dramatically since then.

Izard asks if MCDA has been in dialogue with peers regarding the COVID-19 response. Idzikowski responds yes, MCDA involved with NC4a, NACO, and WAAN among others. MCDA's response has been on leading edge.

IV. Legislative & Policy Updates

- **Federal Aging Policy Briefing**
 - *OAA reauthorization & funding*

Idzikowski reports that there have thus far been three federal COVID-19 related bills.

Older Americans Act (HR4344) reauthorization passed both the House and Senate and signed into law, providing a five (5) year reauthorization.

Additional funding through second COVID-19 Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided \$870,000 in additional nutritional funds for our meal distribution programs.

The CARES Act (HR 748) provided \$870M additional funding for OAA programs: nutrition (\$480M), supportive services (\$200M), family caregiver support (\$100M), Elder Rights (\$20M), ADRCs (\$50M), as well as CDBG (\$1B), LIHEAP (\$900M) and FoodShare/SNAP (\$15.5B), virtual access to nursing home / long term care ombudsman. Expanded eligibility. Telehealth and eliminate cost sharing for COVID-19 testing. Individual stimulus payments include Social Security recipients: \$1200/\$2400 + \$500 per dependent child. Forgivable loans for small businesses.

SHIP funding also will increase and Medicare outreach plans being coordinated in Milwaukee.

Transit related advocacy resulting in additional \$50M for public transit authorities during crisis.

Medicare changes: eliminate 3-day hospital stay requirement for SNF coverage waived for COVID-19+ cases, waived co-pay for COVID-19 testing. Hearings on schedule online.

Griffith asks about \$1200 stimulus – will it affect other benefits? Idzikowski believes that the answer is no – wouldn't be a countable benefit against other benefit eligibility. Public Assistance rule regarding immigrants is waived for COVID-19 stimulus.

Izard comments information should be rolled out in shorter chunks, so we can give feedback.

State Legislative Issues

Hearing on AB521 was held in the Assembly Ways and Means Committee on March 5th. Commissioners Izard and Pumphrey provided testimony, along with a host of other state and local supporters. Bill authorized Milwaukee County to hold a referendum in the County raise the sales tax by 1%. However, the bill failed to advance, since the Assembly session had ended and this hearing was deemed for informational purposes only. The Committee chair indicated that Milwaukee County and City first had to address the underfunding of their pensions first.

Abston-Coleman summarizes that the legislature is asking that the County address pension insolvency first before taking up the additional funding proposal. Praised Commissioner Izard and Pumphrey's testimony to the Ways and Means Committee.

Griffith comments that this is a red herring, as a way to divert responsibility from need for additional funding. At the local level the courts have already ruled and there is nothing the County and City can do about the pension insolvency.

Moeser comments that the pension is an important issue, but sounds like this was a slow walk. Izard notes that both the City and County did present on pension insolvency.

Pumphrey states that this was an exercise in futility because the leadership had already decided this bill was not going move forward because they had already suspended the session. Every presentation was supportive and comprehensive across the state.

Izard and Pumphrey note that the business community was also supportive including GMAC.

Abston-Coleman asks if there is other written support that the Commission could provide.

Idzikowski notes that the legislature was refusing to meet to consider a Medicaid waiver request to CMS for COVID-19 related Medicaid funding and flexibilities. Legislature claiming only it has the power to approve a Medicaid waiver and the Governor cannot move forward. As a result, Wisconsin is one of the last states to apply for additional funding and flexibility. May mean no additional federal match funding for hospitals and skilled care under the COVID-19 crisis.

Griffith brings up voting issues.

V. Promotion of the 2020 Census

Census moving forward. In person canvassing moved back by two weeks. Individuals should have already received a mailing with their census ID. Recommends that Committee members view the [Census2020.gov](https://www.census2020.gov) site. Continue to stress that a full count is necessary for Milwaukee County to receive a fair share of federal resources.

VI. Voting and Voter Access Issues

Griffith notes there has been a lot of advocacy around voting. Perhaps Commission could write a letter in support of voting access along with support of the Medicaid waiver.

Idzikowski notes that the Governor just today issued an order suspending the spring election, moving voting to June 9th. Prior to this, a federal judge had extended the time for mail-in ballots to be counted. Aging and Disability community concerned because in person voting is preferential for accessibility purposes and didn't want to move to an absentee ballot only voting.

Thus, given the legislature's reluctance to reduce any barriers, such as continuing to require witness signatures for people sheltering in place, having to upload a photo ID in order to receive an absentee ballot, etc. Notes that the Milwaukee County Clerk of Court did issue an advisory that older adults and others sheltering in place under the Safer at Home Order should be able to choose to be identified as "indefinitely confined" and thus able to waive the photo ID requirement. The Supreme Court later clarified that sheltering at home under the Governor's Order alone was insufficient for voters to invoke this provision.

Idzikowski updates that the Governor's order is being challenged by the legislature in the Supreme Court, so it is possible that the election will move forward tomorrow.

Griffith suggests sending a letter supporting the Governor both with regard to delaying the election and submitting a Medicaid waiver. Hoffman calls the question. Discussion follows.

MOTION: Communicate to the legislature the Commission on Aging's position in support of the Governor's order to suspend the election.

ACTION: Passes. Bechtel and Troestler abstain (Pumphrey, Griffith).

VII. Public Comment

No public comment.

VIII. Announcements & Advocacy Opportunities

- *WAAN (Thursday, March 5th – Dane County ADRC)*
- *Aging Advocacy Day (May 12th – Madison)*

IX. Future agenda items & meeting dates

None suggested.

X. Adjourn

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

ACTION: Unanimous (Troestler, Abston-Coleman).

The Advocacy Committee meeting adjourned at 3:31 PM. The next Advocacy Committee meeting will be May 4, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,
Daniel Idzikowski
Program and Policy Coordinator