



Commission on Aging

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December 12, 2025

Representative Patrick Snyder
Room 307 North
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Re: Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Recommendations to the Speaker's Task
Force on Elder Services

Dear Chair Snyder,

On behalf of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging, we are writing today in support of the work of the Speaker's Task Force on Elder Services. We are grateful that the Assembly elevated the opportunity to share the importance of issues pertaining to older adults in the State of Wisconsin and we urge your support for critical aging programs and services in the next legislative session.

We are asking for your support of the programs and services that support older adults to thrive throughout the lifespan, not just in Milwaukee County, but throughout the entire State. These priorities support the ability of older adults to continue living in their own homes and communities safely, independently, comfortably, and make Wisconsin a good place to grow old. We are hopeful the Task Force will consider these priorities when making its final recommendations.

1. Scams Targeting Elderly Populations.

We echo concerns raised by other agencies, stakeholders, and older adults regarding the increase in scams and fraud that older adults face daily. As these scams become more sophisticated, utilizing increasingly complex technology, older adults are vulnerable to manipulation and risk loss of the resources and income they rely on. An older adult that volunteers on our local Commission on Aging Advocacy Committee shared that she was scammed out of more than \$7,000, which not only caused her financial hardship, but left long-lasting impacts on her mental wellbeing.

As the rise in scams related to cryptocurrency and crypto ATMS become increasingly common, we recommend stricter regulations that safeguard consumers. Our recommendation is in support of legislation that imposes daily transactions limits, caps transaction fees, provides user warnings, and provides refunds on certain qualifying payments. There are 19 states implementing or considering implementing regulations on crypto ATMs and we want Wisconsin to be included.

2. Statewide Medicaid Coordination Workgroup.

The implementation of H.R.1 will result in widespread changes to the state's various Medicaid programs. Milwaukee County's older adults make up a disproportionate number of enrollees in Medicaid funded long-term care programs. PACE, which is exclusively for the elderly, is composed of 67.9 percent of enrollees from Milwaukee County. In the IRIS program, 56.6 percent of the frail elderly enrollees are Milwaukee County residents.

Enrolling in a Medicaid long-term care program necessitates interacting with one of the 65 Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) throughout the state. As we anticipate these changes to Medicaid, and seek to proactively address challenges, we support coordination amongst all levels of government to improve the consumer experience. A Statewide Medicaid Coordination Workgroup, composed of ADRCs, the State Department of Health Services, Income Maintenance, legislators, healthcare professionals, consumers, and other stakeholders can help problem-solve, share best practices, and provide valuable education to all parties.

3. Increased Funding to Support Aging Programs and Services.

Currently, the State budget provides just \$868,794 statewide to support senior nutrition programs. Cuts in federal funding, rising food costs, and increased demand for services mean we are forced to do more with less every year. In 2024, we increased the suggested meal donation from \$3 to \$4 to try to recuperate some of the costs of operating the program. For many participants, the single meal they receive through the home-delivered meals program is the only nutritious meal they receive all day. In Milwaukee County, participants in this program saw reduced malnutrition scores after just three months of receiving meals. Senior nutrition programs are proven to effectuate health outcomes in older adults.

We are also seeking increased funding to the s.85.21 specialized transportation program, which specifically provides funding to counties to provide assistive transportation to older adults and individuals with disabilities. Through this program, older adults and individuals with disabilities can access crucial medical appointments. Each year, we provide about 19,000 rides to medical appointments to our older adult residents. Nearly 40 percent of Milwaukee County older adults do not drive and 50 percent live alone. Without this service, residents would be forced to pay exorbitant costs for private services or simply forgo necessary medical care. Funding for this program has not increased in the past five years, although need has increased, forcing us to increase fares and limit rides in the non-healthcare portion of the program.

Finally, we are supportive of investing \$450,000 into the state's Healthy Aging Grants program to reduce falls, manage chronic conditions, and increase physical activity. Falls are the number one cause of injuries in older adults and are a key driver of emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and nursing home admissions. \$1 billion is spent annually on falls-related

health costs in Wisconsin, which includes Medicare, Medicaid, and out-of-pocket expenses. In 2024, there were 25 Falls Prevention workshops in Milwaukee County that served 273 participants. With the support of Healthy Aging Grants, Milwaukee County can expand its evidence-based wellness programs to more residents, which can reduce the burden of care that falls on the healthcare system and public safety.

4. Programs to Prevent Housing Insecurity and Homelessness for Older Adults.

Adults aged 50 and older are the fastest growing population experiencing homelessness in Milwaukee County. This is due to several factors including increased economic instability due to rising costs and fixed incomes, lack of affordable housing options, and loss of family and social support. In Milwaukee County, 36.8 percent of older adults 60 and older live alone, which can make them more susceptible to housing insecurity. If they encounter an economic hardship or health setback, they may not have supports to keep their home. One strategy is the development of shared housing models that pair up older adults experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in a shared unit. Not only does this model address housing issues but combats social isolation and loneliness. Shared arrangements can enable a stronger emphasis on social connection through peer support groups, communal spaces, and structured social activities. We are supportive of changes in state law that reduce regulatory barriers to zoning land for alternative housing options.

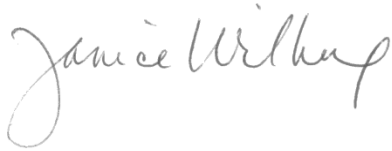
A recent survey of Milwaukee County older adults indicated that 93.4 percent found it extremely or very important to them to live in their own homes as they age. Aging in place supports the health and wellbeing of older adults as they remain engaged in their communities and with their social supports. We encourage exploration of a program like the City of Philadelphia's "Senior Citizen Real Estate Tax Freeze" program, which "freezes" the real estate tax of qualifying older adults if their property assessment or tax rate changes. This solution provides older adults the opportunity to live in their homes, and in their communities, as long as possible.

Under Wis. Stat. § 16.03, the State of Wisconsin's Interagency Council on Homelessness establishes and reviews the statewide policy on preventing and ending homelessness in the state. The action plan as defined in the latest report, "2021-2023 Welcoming Wisconsin Home," does not specifically reference older adults as a population in need of assistance. We are recommending that this statute be updated to reflect older adults as a growing population for which insecurity and homelessness must be addressed.

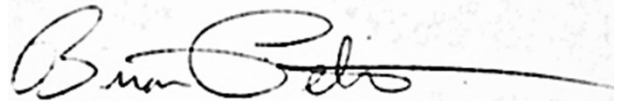
While we have highlighted these four recommendations for the Task Force to consider, we know there are many opportunities to improve the wellbeing of Wisconsin's older adult residents. More than 45,000 calls have come into our Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) so far in 2025. ADRC staff have responded to inquiries about all these concerns—dealing with scams, concerns about Medicaid changes, enrolling in Meals on Wheels, and where to find housing, and more. While we have services in place to respond to these concerns in one way or another, the need in the community is very high and without additional resources from the state, we will need to assess how we continue to serve our aging population.

Thank you for recognizing the importance of aging issues in Wisconsin and we look forward to the recommendations that the Task Force develops. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can provide any more information on these, or any other, aging matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janice Wilberg".

Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.
Chair
Milwaukee County Commission on Aging

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Peters".

Brian Peters
Legislative Officer
Milwaukee County Commission on Aging