



## Advocacy Committee Meeting September 11, 2023

Advocacy Committee members convened virtually on September 11, 2023. Members and attendees joined the virtual meeting with video conference and conference call.

### **Members Present:**

Chair Elliot Moeser, Commissioner  
Vice-Chair Sharon Jackson  
John Griffith, Commissioner  
Cindy Van Vreede, Commissioner  
Supervisor Sequanna Taylor  
Sopheya Farrell  
Trina Koch  
Gary Mikolajczyk  
Paul Pedersen

### **Staff Present Continued...**

Daniel Idzikowski, *DHHS*  
Jill Knight, *DHHS*  
Marietta Luster, *DHHS*  
Vonda Nyang, *DHHS*  
Ortrialla Paris, *DHHS*  
Emily Petersen, *DHHS*  
Mary Proctor Brown, *DHHS*  
Kayla Steinke, *DHHS*  
Nina Yang, *DHHS*

### **Members Excused:**

T.R. Edwards  
Maureen Fitzgerald  
William Meunier  
Harold Oemig

### **Attendees from the Public**

Gloria Miller, Commissioner  
Rebecca Burrett, Senator Tammy Baldwin  
Maureen Conrad  
Joseph Crivello  
Keshawn Williams  
Derrick Cainion, ASL Interpreter  
Scott Kawczynski, ASL Interpreter

### **Staff Present**

Andrew Bethke, *DHHS*  
Alena DeGrado, *DHHS*  
Matt Fortman, *DHHS*

## MINUTES

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

Chair Elliot Moeser called the Advocacy Committee meeting to order at 3 p.m. Emily Petersen, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Department of Health and Human Services, Aging and Disabilities Services, Aging Unit, called the roll. A quorum was present.

### **II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MONDAY, AUGUST 7, 2023, ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**MOTION:** To accept the August 7, 2023, Advocacy Committee meeting minutes.  
**ACTION:** Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Van Vreede, Pedersen Second).

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

- i. **Virtual Meetings Reminder:** Ms. Petersen stated that there were no updates on virtual meetings. Chair Moeser said that the Advocacy Committee will continue to meet virtually. The Advocacy Committee will meet at 3 p.m. the first Monday of the month, unless there is a change.
- ii. **2023 Senior Leadership Program:** Ms. Petersen reminded the Committee that the Senior Leadership Program is taking place at the end of September, from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Commission on Aging meetings are held both virtually and in-person. If you are interested in meeting the Senior Leadership Program participants, and seeing them graduate, they will be attending the September Commission on Aging meeting. The September in-person meeting is at Wilson Park Senior Center. Ms. Petersen will send out an email reminder to everyone.
- iii. **Ageism Awareness Day:** Ageism Awareness Day is on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

#### **IV. REPORT ON THE AUGUST 25, 2023, COMMISSION ON AGING MEETING**

Ms. Petersen stated that Congresswoman Gwen Moore attended the meeting and reported on Federal legislative updates. She also stated that there was a discussion about a potential Aging and Disabilities Services document that could be used as a one-page overview of our programs and services. The document would help us during our advocacy efforts. The Commission approved several action items, including funding for ARPA projects. Using funds from a USAging grant, we will be starting a vaccination initiative to promote COVID-19 vaccines and boosters. Fiscal Administrator Matt Fortman presented the Department's 2024 Budget Requests.

#### **V. UPDATE ON ACTION ITEMS (Information/Discussion)**

- a) **Comments on the Older Americans Act Regulations:** Ms. Petersen took the Committee's feedback and incorporated it into the comment. The feedback provided valuable insight and helped make our comment even better. She submitted the comment before the August 15, 2023, deadline.
- b) **Family Care MCO Acquisition Letter:** Director Idzikowski is drafting a letter, but it is not complete yet. Once the letter is complete, it will be brought to the Committee for review and approval. Director Idzikowski informed the Committee that the Commissioner of Insurance is reviewing the acquisitions before they are finalized.

#### **VI. LEGISLATIVE & POLICY UPDATES (Discussion/Action)**

- a) **Federal Aging Policy**

- i. **Federal Budget & Issues:** Rebecca Buretta, Regional Policy Director for Senator Tammy Baldwin, gave an update on Federal policy issues. Director Buretta stated that Senator Baldwin is working on a policy to support women in retirement. This legislation will help women overcome barriers that systematically set them back from achieving financial security in retirement. The press releases and data are on the website. This legislation will provide enhanced tools to ensure women can better prepare for retirement, including strengthened consumer protections for safeguarding retirement savings and increased financial literacy. It will also support low-income women and survivors of domestic abuse seeking retirement benefits.

In addition to the Women's Retirement Protection Act, Senator Baldwin will be working on cutting the cost of health care and prescription drugs. The Inflation Reduction Act lowers the cost of health care and prescription drugs by giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices and capping the out-of-pocket costs. The cost of insulin is now capped at **\$35 per month** for seniors on Medicare and requires that all vaccines covered under Medicare Part D be free. In addition, the first ten drugs were selected for Medicare price negotiation. The negotiations begin this year. The negotiated prices will go into effect in 2026. More drugs will be selected for negotiation in subsequent years. The IRA is estimated to both lower average drug prices for Medicare enrollees and reduce the Federal budget deficit by \$25 billion by 2031.

Senator Baldwin will also join legislation to improve voter access for Americans. The Freedom to Vote Act elevates the voices of voters by expanding access to the ballot box, ending partisan gerrymandering, protecting our elections from undue influence, and combating secret money in our elections. State Legislatures have introduced restrictive voting bills in 45 states, including Wisconsin. This legislation will expand early access to the ballot so that there is a baseline national standard for early voting. This bill also creates a no-excuse vote-by-mail process for every eligible voter. The legislation also introduces standardized identification requirements for in-person voting, which will allow the use of a range of identification forms.

The bill also addresses voter suppression in response to efforts to suppress minority access to the ballot. The bill will prohibit the dissemination of false and misleading information, establish federal criminal penalties for violations, and increase existing penalties for voter intimidation. Included in the bill is a provision to counter excessive lines, which present an additional barrier to voting for Black and Latino voters. Voting lines should last no longer than 30 minutes and states cannot prohibit donations of food or water to voters waiting in line.

This bill also tightens the rules intended to keep Super PACs and other outside groups from coordinating with campaigns. The Federal Election Commission will be required to investigate potential violations of the law without being stymied by partisan gridlock.

The Senator is also working on a bipartisan bill to expand access to palliative care. Senator Baldwin and Senator Bob Casey are collaborating on the Better Care Jobs Act. This will enhance Medicaid funding for home health care and help more than 650,000 people. Providing home health care allows individuals to stay active in their communities and live independently. This legislation would also strengthen the caregiving workforce. Senator Baldwin has been a champion of these efforts for many years. She previously introduced the Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act.

Rebecca has offered to connect anyone in need of Federal services with the appropriate resources. She will connect with Emily to develop a method of organizing requests.

ii. **Federal Regulations & Executive Orders:** Topic was not discussed.

iii. **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Rule Proposal**

**Comment:** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is accepting comments on payment policies under the Physician Fee Schedule and other changes to Part B Payments. Emily put together a draft comment that was sent around to Committee members earlier today. Because comments are due on September 11<sup>th</sup> at 5 PM, the letter will not go to the Commission on Aging for approval and will be authored by the Area Agency on Aging. She can incorporate any feedback from the Advocacy Committee before submitting at 5 p.m.

The comment includes feedback on the definition of caregivers, recommendations that align with the proposed CARE Act, and other provisions that support caregivers.

**b) State Legislative Issues**

i. **Wisconsin Department of Transportation Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan Comment:**

Alena DeGrado, Transportation Coordinator stated that the Transition Plan addresses public infrastructure, specifically evaluating state highways that are out of compliance with the ADA. Much of what they are looking at are curb improvements and crosswalks. They also look at DMV service centers, rest areas and way stations, and ramp improvement projects. Ms. DeGrado highlighted the need for more protective measures, such as

raised crosswalks and accessible pedestrian signals. She said these are things that the National Association of City Transportation Officials would recommend as engineering design standards for roads.

Committee members noted the extensive list of projects noted on the list and the great length of time proposed to complete the projects. There was support for submitting a comment in support of the plan, with the caveat that it includes a request that there be expediency in completing the proposed projects.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Griffith moved submission of a letter of support for Wisconsin Department of Transportation ADA Transition Plan with the inclusion of a request that the timeline of project completion be moved up.

**ACTION:** Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Griffith Moved, Koch Second).

**c) Milwaukee County Legislative Issues:** Supervisor Sequanna Taylor stated that the Senior Leadership Program is coming up later this month. Participants will attend the County Board meeting and meet their County Supervisor. They will see how the County Board works and the different processes that go along with it. Supervisor Taylor stated that there is funding to purchase new equipment at each of the Senior Centers. Finally, Supervisor Taylor stated that all meeting agendas for the County Board and its committees can be found on CLIC.

## VII. DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

**i. Milwaukee County mental health services and programs status:** Chair Moeser introduced this topic by discussing the difficulties faced by the county in providing mental health services to seniors. Recently, Milwaukee County has completed the construction of two new mental health facilities—Granite Hills and the Mental Health Emergency Center. However, there have been challenges in securing qualified personnel. The county needs to invest more in mental health services, not just in terms of location and facilities, but also in hiring and compensating qualified personnel. Given we are in the process of deliberating the 2024 County Budget, should there be an additional allocation to enhance mental health services? What is the status of the reserved unit for senior mental health services?

**MOTION:** Commissioner Griffith moved that Milwaukee County provide greater investment in funding and resources for mental health services for seniors.

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

ii. **Milwaukee County Aging and Disabilities Services Budget:** Fiscal Administrator Matt Fortman stated that his focus has been on expanding and enhancing services by identifying state grants, federal grants, and other sustainable funding sources in order to reduce reliance on tax levy. Several program areas received funding increases in 2024. The Children's Long-Term Support program received a \$1.6 million increase to expand enrollment. An additional \$2.8 million was allocated to expand funding for housing programs. The Area Agency on Aging is receiving an increase of \$100,000 through the Older Americans Act. Additional staff and funding are provided to the Aging and Disability Resource Center. The Comprehensive Community Service Program includes a \$9 million increase. Efforts were made to address staffing constraints by creating new paid internship positions and peer specialist roles. Community Support Program providers received a rate increase to help retain staff and reduce turnover.

The budget was challenging due to limited tax levy, resulting in reductions to community-based youth justice programming, which is not a mandated service. Matt submitted the Advocacy Committee's supplemental budget request of \$170,000 to support older adult programs and services. By the end of the month, we will know if the County Executive included it in his Recommended Budget.

The Committee expressed interest in increasing the existing supplement budget request by \$97,000 to further support programs and services for older adults. Committee members also discussed not creating the Deputy Director position and instead using the funding earmarked for that position or direct services and programs. Matt understood the Committee's desires but stated that supplemental budget requests were submitted several months ago and could not be amended. However, he would provide this updated request to the County Executive's Office to see if there was a way to accommodate it, although it may not be included.

**MOTION:** Chair Moeser moved that the supplemental budget request for Aging Services be increased from \$170,000 to \$267,000 and that the Deputy Director position not be included in the budget.

**ACTION:** Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Moeser Moved, Koch Second)

iii. **Federal Government Funding & Potential Shutdown:** Ms. Petersen reported that she does not know whether a shutdown will occur at this time. It seems likely that Congress will pass some form of temporary funding bill to avoid a prolonged shutdown. This has happened frequently in the past. Congress will pass ongoing Continuing Resolutions to fund the government at stagnant levels on a short-term basis. She stated that she will keep the Committee updated at later meetings.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** To Adjourn

**ACTION:** Motion prevailed by unanimous consent (Koch Moved, Jackson Second).

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ortrilla Paris  
Clerical Assistant 1

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