



December 17, 2021

Milwaukee County ARPA Task Force

Re: Recommendations of the Commission on Aging Select Committee on Senior Centers for the Allocation of Milwaukee County ARPA Funding

Dear Honorable members of the Milwaukee County ARPA Task Force,

Thank you for this opportunity to present our recommendations for utilizing a portion of Milwaukee County’s ARPA funding to support, sustain, and ensure the success of our Milwaukee County senior centers.

Our five current Milwaukee County owned senior centers – Clinton Rose, Kelly, McGovern, Washington Park, and Wilson – form a core component of Milwaukee County’s support and resources for our older adult residents. Since 2017, they have also been the subject, along with senior center programming generally, of an extensive study, review, and public feedback process. Through this process, three independent reports have been produced:

- Senior Centers Assessment and Facility Condition Report (2017)
- Young at Heart: Exploring the Future of Senior Centers in Milwaukee County (Wisconsin Policy Forum, 2019); and
- Envisioning the Future: Milwaukee County Senior Centers (2020)

In 2020 the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging established the Select Committee on Senior Centers to evaluate these reports and make recommendations for promotion, programming, infrastructure, funding, and partnerships for senior centers in Milwaukee County. Most recently this committee produced “The MKE Hubs”, a strategic vision for our senior centers and “A Path Forward”, outlining the work ahead to renew, revitalize, and remodel our senior centers, as well as several goals that have been incorporated into the new 2022-24 Area Aging Plan.

We come before you, based upon this generous body of work, to request an allocation of thirty million dollars in Milwaukee County ARPA funds that will allow this vision to come to life and offset the significant commitment of capital expenditures Milwaukee County has already made, or plans to make in the near future, to sustain these centers.

**Commission on Aging**

**Bettie Rodgers, J.D., M.S.W.**  
Chair

**Amber Miller**  
Vice Chair  
Chair, Service Delivery Committee

**John Griffith**  
Secretary  
Chair, Advocacy Committee

**Elliott Moeser, Ph.D.**  
Legislative Officer  
Chair, Strategic Governance Select Committee

**Sup. Jason Haas**  
County Supervisor

**Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Advisory Council

**Gloria Pitchford-Nicholas, Ed.D.**  
Chair, Senior Centers Select Committee

**Gloria Miller**  
Chair, Wellness Committee

Lily Alvarado  
Ronald Byington  
Richmond Izard  
Leonor Rosas  
Cherie Swenson

We understand that Milwaukee County faces many fiscal challenges and a tremendous backlog of deferred maintenance and infrastructure repair needs. Yet, we challenge this Task Force to consider the disproportionate toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on the older adult population of Milwaukee County with regard to both health and social isolation. While ARPA funding is flexible, we assert that allotting a significant portion of these funds to senior centers will directly align with their underlying purpose – to help remedy the health, social, and fiscal consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable and affected populations.

While the work of the Commission on Aging regarding the future of our senior centers will continue, its recommendations regarding policies, programming, and funding affecting older adults must be given due consideration. Our request is to provide adequate funding to address longstanding infrastructure and deferred maintenance needs, enhance access to both the centers and improved programming, and explore new facilities to meet the needs of the next generation of older adults. Thus, thirty million dollars is requested based upon the following needs:

- \$25 million dollars to address infrastructure needs at the five Milwaukee County owned senior centers. This is the replacement value of the senior centers identified in the 2017 DAS Facilities report minus the \$1 million in major projects already completed. While some projects have been completed, many more will be necessary in the near future to maintain the existing facilities, including \$9.5 million already scheduled in the 5-year capital plan. The Select Committee on Senior Centers counsels that in addition to basic maintenance, each facility will need structural updates to align with new uses and enhanced programming, including broadband. Moreover, because of the age, location, and functional mismatch of some of these centers, the county should consider deferring further expensive infrastructure investments and instead utilize ARPA funding as leverage to gain partnership funds for replacement and relocation of new facilities.
- \$3 million dollars to address public access to the centers, including enhanced egress, parking, and accessways for public transit stops to the door of each center.
- \$1.5 million dollars to ensure full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Architectural Barriers Act at each facility.
- \$0.5 million dollars to retain consultants and conduct a professional market study to determine how best to provide future access to senior center programming, particularly in alignment with the County’s strategic priority to address structural racism, including the feasibility of new or upgraded facilities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this significant request. The 2022-27 Milwaukee County Capital Budget already anticipates spending more than \$9.5 million in County levy to address infrastructure needs at the Milwaukee County owned senior centers. We believe it would be both fiscally prudent and responsive to the residents of the County to instead utilize ARPA funding in concert with the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging’s developing strategic plan for our senior centers. We note that 37% of the current Milwaukee County senior center participants are Black, 4% are Hispanic, one-third live in poverty, and more than half live alone.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or concerns about this request, we would be pleased to present more information or testify in person. All of the background information referenced in this request can be found on the Milwaukee County DHHS Division on Aging website: [Envisioning Our Senior Centers \(milwaukee.gov\)](https://www.milwaukee.gov/Envisioning-Our-Senior-Centers).

Sincerely,



Gloria Pitchford Nicholas, Ed.D.  
Chair, Select Committee on Senior Centers  
Milwaukee County Commission on Aging



Bettie Rodgers, M.S.W, J.D.  
Chair  
Milwaukee County Commission on Aging