



## Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Advocacy Committee *Local Advocacy Priorities*

### **1) Multipurpose Senior Centers**

**Background.** The Older Americans Act, Section 306(a) provides that each AAA area plan shall “provide for, where appropriate, the establishment, maintenance, or construction of multipurpose senior centers and entering into agreements with providers of multipurpose senior centers” and “designate, where feasible, a focal point for comprehensive service delivery in each community, giving special consideration to designating multipurpose senior centers as such focal point.” Milwaukee County owns and operates five multipurpose senior centers: Clinton Rose, Kelly, McGovern Park, Washington Park, and Wilson Park. These centers are geographically diverse, although all but Kelly are located in the City of Milwaukee. Other communities and private entities own and operate senior centers, including many that serve as senior congregate dining sites.

**Status.** Over the past decade, participation at Milwaukee County’s multipurpose senior centers has declined. Infrastructure at the Centers has deteriorated over time and the County has deferred maintenance and capital improvements necessary to ensure the long-term structural integrity and accessibility of these centers. County capital needs greatly exceed available revenue and reserves and the centers are but one county-owned asset that suffer from this fiscal shortfall. In 2017, MCDA and the Milwaukee County facilities team both completed a baseline assessment of the programs and activities occurring in the Centers and the buildings condition. In 2018, MCDA commissioned a study by the Wisconsin Policy Forum to provide strategies that could be implemented to improve social programming for seniors in a way that is fiscally sustainable. MCDA is assessing the viability of the existing centers.

**Position.** Support the continued operation of multipurpose senior centers and advocate for the County Board to allocate sufficient resources to create/maintain/operate a diverse system of multipurpose senior centers that meet the needs of Milwaukee’s growing aging population and assist it in achieving the objectives of the area plan and as a focal point for service delivery by MCDA.

### **2) Voter Rights**

**Background.** Voting is a fundamental right of citizens in a democracy. Over time, constitutional and legal restrictions of the right to vote have been removed. Several federal laws protect the voting rights of older Americans and people with disabilities and require accessible polling places. For example, the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (VAEHA) requires accessible polling places in federal elections for elderly individuals. Where no accessible location is available to serve as a polling place, voters must be provided an alternate means of voting. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 requires all offices that provide public assistance or state-funded programs that primarily serve persons with disabilities to also provide the opportunity to register to vote in federal elections.

**Status.** During the past decade, Wisconsin has passed several laws that have added new verification requirements for voter registration and voting, restricted the times and locations for voting, and changed the state entity responsible for overseeing elections. These provisions have increased the burden on elderly persons who wish to exercise their right to vote. At the same time, Wisconsin has instituted a system of electronic / online registration which increases access for some voters.

**Position.** Advocate for removal of barriers to registration and voting in all elections and polling places in Milwaukee County. Provide funding to assist with education, outreach, and assistance for older adults to register to vote, exercise the right to vote, and increase accessibility of polling places and procedures.



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### **3) Livable Communities**

**Background.** With 29% of older adults in Wisconsin living alone, isolation impacts our diverse older adult population regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. According to a SCAN survey (2017) of older adults, 82% of surveyed individuals age 65 and older know at least one person who is lonely, yet 58% would be reluctant to admit if they themselves felt isolated. Livable communities are one way to address social isolation by providing neighborhoods that are vibrant, affordable, and easy to navigate.

**Status.** Local ordinances and budgets are a key indicator of whether communities are welcome and livable, or exclusionary and dangerous by design. Based upon AARP's livability index, which rates housing, neighborhood access, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity, Milwaukee County communities scored between 57-60 on the total index, slightly above average.

**Position.** Advocate for local improvements that provide for pedestrian, bike, and transit friendly streets, zone for affordable housing, provide adequate funding for public safety, improve parks and recreational opportunities, eliminate food deserts, embrace lifelong learning, and encourage neighborhood economic development.

### **4) Fair Deal**

**Background.** In 2019, the Milwaukee County Executive and Chair of the County Board co-chaired a workgroup to research disparities in revenue sharing from state government that disadvantaged Milwaukee County. The workgroup believes that Milwaukee County should gain back local control to raise revenues and that formulas for intergovernmental transfers should be adjusted to provide a fairer share to Milwaukee County. These include:

- Shared revenue programs such as Community Aids, Youth Aids, etc. have been flat. Ask that these shared revenue sources grow by inflation each year, and not offset by other revenues.
- Milwaukee County to receive full reimbursement for patrol of state highways.
- Courts: 80% of court fees go to state. Make it a 50/50 split with counties.
- Medicaid: Milwaukee County bears MOE costs for long-term care. Ask State to accept Medicaid expansion to decrease State match percentage to 10% and increase overall Medicaid funding.
- Youth Justice facility expansion: include sufficient ongoing operational funding for quality programming and not just capital funding to build a new facility.

**Status.** The workgroup's recommendations have been adopted by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and a resolution signed by the County Executive on February 7, 2019. An implementation workgroup was formed. The Chair of the Commission on Aging was a member of the Workgroup.

**Position.** Urge increased shared revenue funding from the state of Wisconsin to Milwaukee County and increased local control to ensure adequate support for senior programs, parks, and transportation. Include discussion of the EBS funding formula in the fair deal disparities implementation to increase the share of funding received by Milwaukee County to carry out the Elderly Benefit Specialist program.



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### 5) **Transit**

**Background.** At its best, public transportation is as reliable as driving, more efficient, less stressful and cheaper. For older adults who no longer can or desire to drive, public transit should be accessible, available, and affordable. Funding for the Milwaukee Transit System has declined and the County is seeking ways to improve transit services within its funding constraints and usage demands

**Status.** Milwaukee County is redesigning routes for the future of transit in Milwaukee County. MCTS NEXT is a process for examining how MCTS can provide faster service with more connections and increased accessibility and ease of use, including the creation of more high frequency bus routes. MCTS held a series of public meetings in 2018 to gain feedback on their plan and is accepting public comments at <http://www.ridemcts.com/programs/mcts-next/mcts-next-survey>.

**Position.** Advocate for continued subsidizing of the Milwaukee County Transit system for low-income seniors and people with disabilities. Advocate for routes that serve Milwaukee County Senior Centers, meal sites, shopping, and health centers that seniors wish to access.