



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Department on Aging

**Milwaukee County Commission on Aging
Advocacy Committee Meeting
JUNE 1, 2020**

The Advocacy Committee held its monthly meeting on Monday, June 1, 2020, by video & teleconference. Attendance was taken verbally.

Members Present:

Commissioner Shirley Sharp, Chair
Commissioner George Pumphrey, Vice Chair
Commissioner Sharon Abston-Coleman
Maureen Conrad
John Griffith
Commissioner Jason Haas
David Hoffman
Gary Mikolajczyk
Elliot Moeser
Alice Pugh
Judy Troestler
Cindy Van Vreede

Commissioners Present:

Richmond Izard, Commission Chair
Commissioner Amber Miller

Staff Present:

Daniel Idzikowski, MCDA Program & Policy
Coordinator
Andy Bethke, MCDA Outreach Social Worker
Pam Mathews, MC Budget Analyst
Alec Knutson, MC Legislative Liaison

Guests Present:

Christie Carter
Lola Chambers
Judith Free
Matthew Hayes
Dain Maddox
Natalie S.
Darrin Wasniewski

31 total participants online.

MINUTES

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Shirley Sharp called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. The meeting was held by teleconference and recorded.

II. Review/Approval of May 4, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes

MOTION: Approve the May 4, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes as written.

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

III. Updates on Action Items

Idzikowski notes the updates in response to the last meeting. Letter supporting federal funding for counties and letter indicating disapproval of the action taken by the state legislature in permanently reducing the training hours required for CNA's were not completed. He will draft these letters this coming week.

Final action item was to send a letter to municipalities in Milwaukee County encouraging them to send an absentee ballot request forms to all registered voters. However, this action was moot because the Wisconsin Election Commission voted to send absentee ballot request forms to all registered voters in the state. Idzikowski encouraged the WEC to take this action on behalf of the Commission.

IV. National Party Platform Response

Idzikowski refers to the Democratic and Republican party platform statements related to aging that had been included in the packets. Due to COVID-19, no live convention will be held in Milwaukee at which time the Commission could take action, so the Commission could consider writing a statement to the national political parties.

Mikolajczyk notes that the President has suggested dropping the payroll tax as a stimulus measure. The payroll tax funds Social Security and Medicare. We would like to increase the income limits for folks to pay into Social Security, not to eliminate or suspend the payroll tax. Griffith concurs that the Commission should advocate for the elimination of the cap on the income limit to contribute to Social Security. Troestler agrees.

Mikolajczyk notes that the Wisconsin State Democratic convention will occurring soon. Suggests looking at what the state parties consider and responding to them.

Pumphrey asks Mikolajczyk to lead an informal workgroup to draft a response to the Democratic and Republican party platforms for consideration at the next Advocacy Committee meeting. He notes that it is important to address both Republican and Democratic platforms, particularly in light of the possible impact on Medicare.

V. Legislative & Policy Updates

- ***Federal Aging Policy Briefing***

Idzikowski reports that the House passed a new comprehensive fifth package to provide relief to state and local governments as well as additional individual stimulus. This bill was sent to the Senate, but it was not taken up there, as the leadership stated they wanted to measure the effects of the first rounds of stimulus. Asks if any federal legislative reps are present, but none were present.

- ***State Legislative Issues***

Idzikowski notes that there has been no new state legislation pending, but discusses the administrative actions and the negotiations between the Governor and the legislature regarding the response once the "Safer at Home" order was struck down by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Notes that few local health departments have taken action to follow up, as they are awaiting guidance from the Wisconsin Counties Association. Notes that the state of emergency has ended and this may affect the ability of local governments to recoup losses due to COVID-19.

Idzikowski describes the work of the State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee to address nursing home transfers of COVID-19+ patients, rationing of ventilators, etc. WAAN advocates have been frustrated because the SDMAC meetings have not been well noticed, the ability of the public to comment on their actions has been extremely limited, and the DHS Secretary has thus far not appointed an aging representative to the panel.

Pumphrey comments that he has never heard of an agency posting a public comment period that ends on a Sunday. Wonders if this is legal? Asks when the public health emergency expired. How does this affect older adults?

Idzikowski replies that he is not sure of the exact date the state PHE expired, but that the effect will be on the ability of local governments to be able to recoup their costs due to COVID-19. He notes that the SDMAC meetings have been noticed on an obscure Wisconsin DOAdmin site.

Griffith asks about the WAAN Aging Advocacy Day. Idzikowski responds that the Aging Advocacy Day has been cancelled, but there is discussion about replacing the Day with some form of regional virtual gatherings.

Griffith notes that he will look into the SDMAC issue and will report back to the Committee.

- **Local Issues**

Commissioner Haas reports on County Board issues. Notes that the County Departments have been very active in response to COVID-19, but the County Board's actions have been measured. States that the CEX office has been very communicative in keeping the County Board informed. Relates a very positive outcome with the opening of Clare Hall at the Archdiocesan grounds as a County isolation and care facility for individuals who are homeless or have nowhere else to go if they become symptomatic. This has saved the lives of at least two residents already.

The County has received some relief from the federal and state governments, but not nearly enough to cover the decrease in revenues and increase in expenses due to the COVID-19 response. While the County was expecting \$65 million direct allocation through the CARES Act, the County in fact only received \$15 million. Many County workers, particularly in the Parks Department, have been furloughed, either full or part time. Comptroller noted that if we save money now, it will pay off later with a reduction in the cuts that are needed. No department has been unaffected. For instance, airport business is down 90%. The jail and House of Corrections both had COVID-19 outbreaks. Haas is now chair of the Finance Committee. New County Executive David Crowley meets weekly with Haas to work on finance issues.

Pumphrey asks how much will \$100 million be paired down? Haas responds that much of the federal funds have already been expended to keep services active. Courts are scheduled to reopen soon. Will look further into issue of how large the deficit will be.

Izard asks whether there is an agency that deals with homelessness? Haas responds that the County DHHS Housing Division has a homelessness coordinator.

Idzikowski notes that the State of Wisconsin is expecting 5% across the board budget cuts. The County Departments are now preparing their budgets for submission to the County Executive and are also likely facing across the board cuts to County levy funding. Notes that the Department on Aging considered comments from the public survey and believes that MCDA will be able to sustain all of the current programs, although there may be some levy cuts.

Alec Knutson, legislative liaison from the County Executive's office clarifies that the CARES Act provided \$100 billion in direct relief to state and local governments. Local governments larger than 500,000 were to receive a direct allocation. Milwaukee County was slated to receive \$165 million, the City of Milwaukee about \$100 and Dane County \$100 million. However, an

interpretation by the US Treasury Department determined that the \$165 million in funding was to be split between the County of Milwaukee and the City of Milwaukee and that the City would not receive a separate allocation. As a result, the County's allocation was reduced by \$103 million. The county was only to receive \$63 million with the remainder reverted to the State. Milwaukee County asked the state to restore this funding back to Milwaukee County, but the State distributed the funds to all counties in the state and only provided an additional \$15 million to Milwaukee County, despite the large fiscal impact from COVID-19 on Milwaukee County. Knutson asks the committee for support in advocating with the state and federal governments for additional fiscal relief that this targeted to counties to address their significant needs.

Moeser asks Haas about furloughs in the Department on Aging? Idzikowski responds that there were no furloughs to date in the Department on Aging. Haas notes that the Department on Aging has actually benefited quite a bit from the federal COVID relief funds.

Pumphrey notes that Dane County's allocation turned out to be larger than the allocation to Milwaukee County, which doesn't make sense in terms of the relative size of the populations.

VI. Honoring Tom Frazier

Pumphrey asks where we stand on these plans. Idzikowski notes that this discussion has been postponed until this meeting. While the Department has sent a certificate and condolences, the idea advanced by member Haase was to establish an Advocacy award named in honor of Tom Frazier.

Moeser agrees that it would be appropriate to establish an annual advocacy award in Tom Frazier's name to an older adult who made a significant contribution in public policy from Milwaukee County.

MOTION: That the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging Advocacy Committee establish a workgroup to set forth criteria, methodology, and style of an annual advocacy award by the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging in honor of Tom Frazier.

ACTION: Passes unanimously (Moeser, Hoffman).

VII. Voting and Voter Access Issues

Pumphrey calls for discussion on voting issues.

Haas indicates that the Wisconsin Supreme Court has voted to take up the case pending regarding the purge of voters from the rolls that had been enjoined by a lower court. Haas believes that the Court will not be able to rule in time for the August primary, but may rule in time to affect the November general election. Haas offers to discuss advocacy regarding this case privately.

Idzikowski notes his work in concert with the Disability Vote Coalition and the League of Women Voters to address the difficulties in registering to vote or requesting absentee ballots. The DVC will be working with the Wisconsin Election Commission to come up with guides for older adults and alternatives to make it easier for people to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, witness the absentee ballot, and exercise the right to vote by indefinitely confined individuals in nursing homes and other residential facilities. He asks members to think about ways they might be involved to increase advocacy and access to voting.

MOTION: Move the discussion on Voting and Voter Access to the next Advocacy Committee meeting in August.

ACTION: Passes unanimously. (Abston-Coleman, Mikolajczyk).

VIII. Public Comment

No public comment.

IX. Announcements & Advocacy Opportunities

- *WAAN (Thursday, June 4th – online)*
- *Aging Advocacy Day was cancelled.*

X. Future agenda items & meeting dates

XI. Adjourn

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

ACTION: Unanimous (Abston-Coleman, Mikolajczyk).

The Advocacy Committee meeting adjourned at 3:04 PM. The next Advocacy Committee meeting will be August 3, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,
Daniel Idzikowski
Program and Policy Coordinator