

8000 DHHS; merger opposed.

THE AGING DIFFERENCE

Honorable Supervisors,

Whereas administration neglected to 1) consult governing bodies about a department merger, 2) seek public input and 3) provide data to justify proposed changes, the Finance Committee should amend the 2021 budget to keep MCDA separate from DHHS, as was resolved unanimously in 2016 under file #[16-67](#).

I appeal to you as Chair of the Commission on Aging and voice of 170,000 residents age 60+. Seniors comprise 20% of the population, the fastest growing (Census Bureau 2020) and single most consistent demographic to vote (Crowley, 2020). Research also establishes older adults as being the most prayerful (Pew Research Center, 2020). We implore you to hear our prayer.

The commission adopted and published [Milwaukee County Commission on Aging 2020 Public Policy Priorities](#) on January 24, 2020, memorializing the citizen Advocacy Committee's desire to maintain a separate department. Hence, an attempt to divest or merge MCDA at this time is a bad idea, especially with seniors being most at-risk in the pandemic and having had no input into a DHHS/Aging integration plan.

While County Exec Crowley recommends the Aging budget and merger with good intentions, he errs in two critical ways protected by law. First, he overlooks the spirit and plain language of the Older Americans Act (OAA), which requires older adults to be active in all planning and oversight of programs funded by federal and state OAA dollars. Second, administration has subverted the authority of governing bodies to oversee aging business. Furthermore, administration offers no empirical data to support claims that a merger will increase efficiencies and better serve older adults.

Administration fails to identify any inefficiencies or present information common to a basic project charter. An implementation plan should identify objectives, risk mitigation, stakeholders, current and desired state process maps, root cause analysis, and definitions of success. But most profoundly, administration has not sought and included the voice of seniors.

So, why is Aging different?

Mandated senior participation and self-determination marks the aging difference. "The aging difference" is so significant to program development and delivery that "A Manual of Policies, Procedures, & Technical Assistance for the Wisconsin Aging Network" cites the phrase 41 times (DHS, 2011). The manual also expressly addresses issues before us today:

"Considerations about where aging units fit in local government occasionally focus on imagined efficiencies... However, the major point to consider is the effectiveness of the aging unit at representing older people in their government. When counties...are considering altering the place of the aging unit in local government, they are strongly advised to conduct the deliberations in a very public fashion, and must involve older people and their organizations at every level" (DHS, 2011, p. 3-12)

Izard, COA Chair