

8000 DHHS; opposed to merger

Finance-Budget Committee,

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and esteemed Supervisors, for granting me the opportunity to speak at your October 15th meeting in opposition to DHHS/Aging integration. Seeking, hearing and weighing the voice of senior constituents—as well as the voice of the law—is vital not only to this budget decision, but moreover to fulfilling our oaths of office.

As Chairman Haas eloquently states at runtime 3:41:17 - 3:41:43 of the subject meeting video recording:

"Thank you, Aging Chairman Izard. Thank you for your comments and your participation today. I'm glad your voice has been heard through this [forum]. It's a pretty important discussion as we determine the future. We do need to act based upon laws, and we can act based upon recommendations. But there is a difference between a recommendation from an organization or an agency and what the law states."

While it is clear that all parties concede that the Older Americans Act and Wisconsin Elders Act mandates seniors' input during the planning process, Deputy Chief of Staff Milnar McLaughlin's testimony demonstrates that any communicative effort did not begin until mid-September. To be clear, such a belated date makes it virtually impossible to engage older adults with sufficient time to inform budget deliberations. (One can only conclude that administration knowingly and deliberately waited until the 11th hour to commence such outreach.)

"Planning" means older adults shall have input into the analysis, conversations and opinions about how government should go about meeting their needs. Again, "the aging difference" is about seniors' own self-determination, not about administration presuming what is best for seniors. That's the main reason why the act exists, as well as why the Aging unit split from DHHS—because the voice of seniors was historically and systemically overlooked, underrepresented and denied.

Notwithstanding this critical shortcoming, Milnar's own testimony further confirms that all of administration's communications with Commission Chairman Izard, ADRC Governing Board Chairwoman Pat Bruce, and the Commission on Aging have been in the last days leading up to October budget deliberations. It is also worth noting that each Aging governing body has expressly and boldly voiced their opposition to the merger.

Administration would have you believe there is an urgent need to merge the departments. However, that is not the case. Because integration communications have just begun in the last 30 for 45 days, the committee's best decision is to deny ratification of the proposed merger. If administration is as forthcoming as promised, they have ample time next year to convince seniors that a future merger might best fulfill future budgetary and operational concerns for efficiency. To the contrary, prematurely merging the department constitutes an act that would be very difficult to undo.

Respectfully Submitted,

Izard, COA Chair