



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Department on Aging

**Milwaukee County Commission on Aging
Advocacy Committee Meeting
October 5, 2020**

The Advocacy Committee held its monthly meeting on Monday, October 5, 2020, by video & teleconference. Attendance was taken by roll call.

Members Present:

Commissioner Shirley Sharp, Chair
Commissioner George Pumphrey, Vice Chair
Commissioner Sharon Abston-Coleman
Maureen Conrad
Commissioner John Griffith
David Hoffman
Commissioner Richmond Izard
Gary Mikolajczyk
Elliot Moeser
Harold Oemig
Judy Troestler
Cindy Van Vreede

25 total participants online.

Staff Present:

Daniel Idzikowski, MCDA Program & Policy
Coordinator
Julietta Henry, MC Elections Director

Guests Present:

Christie Carter, Milwaukee LGBT Center
Patricia Dunn, CoA Advisory Council
Tom Gossett, Goodwill SEWis
Matthew Hayes, LAW
Diane Robinson, SDC
Stephanie Sue Stein, LPS
Jan Wilbers, LPS
Cathy Wood, SOA
Barbara Wyatt-Sibley, CoA past chair

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 September 21, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes

MOTION: Approve the September 21, 2020 Advocacy Committee minutes as written.

ACTION: Unanimously approved (Griffith, Hoffman).

III. Updates on Action Items

Older Voting Policy Recommendations

Idzikowski forwarded these recommendations to the Wisconsin Election Commission.

Voting and Voter Access Issues

Milwaukee County Elections Director Julietta Henry appeared to address questions regarding early voting, drop boxes in Milwaukee County, and the collection of ballots at the Milwaukee County senior center sites with senior volunteers from October 12th through the 16th. While an

absentee ballot must be returned and counted in the municipality where voters are resident, clerks have been instructed to deliver ballots that have been placed in a ballot box outside of their municipality of residence to the proper municipal clerk's officer prior to election day. Henry notes that all early voted ballots will be checked to ensure that there is a signature and address including zip code of the witness who is an adult elector. If possible, voters will be contacted prior to Election Day informing them they need to correct their ballot. Henry demonstrates the information to be found on the Wisconsin Election Commission site. To date, total absentee ballots in excess of 1,271,000 have been ordered.

Support for a Full-Time MCDA Executive Director

Commission on Aging Chair Richmond Izard reports that the Advocacy Committee's recommendation that the Commission on Aging communicate its support for the appointment and funding of a full time Executive Director for the Department on Aging to the County Executive was taken up at the last Commission on Aging meeting. The Commission has expressed its concern regarding this item and Chair Izard has shared that concern publicly through a press release, in meetings with the County Executive, and with County Supervisors. Izard encourages members to review the County Board Committee on the Whole October 1, 2020 meeting video posted on CLIC.

IV. Racial Equity & Advocacy

Idzikowski notes that Milwaukee County was the first county in the nation to declare racial inequity a public health crisis. Since that time Milwaukee County has engaged in a strategic planning process to reach the vision that by achieving racial equity, Milwaukee County will become the healthiest county in Wisconsin. Reviews the County's Strategic planning process. Asks for discussion by members of the Committee as to how to work together toward this goal.

Conrad notes that as a falls prevention trainer, the County has been trying to expand wellness programming and outreach by training a more ethnically diverse group of wellness trainers. Conrad asks for help in identifying additional older adults of diverse backgrounds to serve as health and wellness program leaders.

Pumphrey inquiries about the Department on Aging's history with respect to racial equity. Given that the Older Americans Act contains a mandate for serving underprivileged populations, how has the Department on Aging carried out that mandate when delivering services to seniors?

Idzikowski replies that Commissioner Pumphrey is accurate in pointing out that the Older Americans Act itself does mandate a preference for serving older adults in populations with socio-economic disadvantage. Thus, since the inception of the Department, all contracts that we sign with our vendors and the Requests for Proposal that the Department releases contain provisions requiring the vendors to state how they will implement this preference when carrying out their programs. However, from a structural point of view, as a government entity, Milwaukee County, has built in implicit bias and we are now trying to identify and root out that bias.

Izard acknowledges the outstanding approach that the racial equity budget tool provides. However, this Committee should know that the Department's answer to Objective #2 on the 2021 racial equity budget tool is misleading because it lists the various stakeholders such as the Commission as being racially diverse and implies that the Commission and committees were consulted regarding the agency budget prior to its submission, when in fact they were not.

Idzikowski asks to extend this discussion to get feedback specifically on ideas to advance racial inequity through the Commission on Aging Advocacy Committee.

Izard notes that the full Commission on Aging has been asked to forward any concerns on this item directly to the County Executive's staff.

Hoffman asks for the racial composition of the voting population in Milwaukee County. Idzikowski notes he does not know off hand but can provide this information on follow-up.

V. Legislative & Policy Updates

• Federal Aging Policy Briefing

Idzikowski directed the Committee's attention to the n4a Policy Action Alert included in the materials and explained that the Congress passed a Continuing Resolution that extending federal funding for the government until December 11, 2020. A coronavirus relief bill, HEROES Act 2.0 was passed by the House. This is a smaller measure at \$2.2 billion than the first HEROES Act that includes critical funding for Older Americans Act, elder justice, elder abuse, and other low-income support programs, as well as operational support for state and county governments. This measure has again stalled in the U.S. Senate. Advocacy is needed by the aging community to ensure that some relief package is passed before the Presidential election.

MOTION: That the Commission on Aging communicate their support for the measures in the HEROES 2.0 Act, H.R. 925 including \$925 million for the Aging Network, reauthorization of the Elder Justice Act, increased federal contribution to state Medicaid programs, and \$436 billion in flexible relief for state and local governments, to Wisconsin's federal delegation.

ACTION: Passes unanimously (Pumphrey, Hoffman)

State Legislative Issues

Idzikowski notes that there is no new state legislation pending. Discusses state budget below. Notes that the final report of the Governor's Task Force on Caregiving is included in the materials and asks the members to reflect on the report.

The SDMAC recommendations regarding ethical framework for distribution of vaccines and other therapeutics are also included. Comments on this framework are due to the state by October 15, 2020 at DHSSDMAC@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Idzikowski notes that the Wisconsin Medicaid director has indicated that Wisconsin will finish the year with a higher than expected Medicaid surplus, largely due to a higher percentage of federal match provided under the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act.

Local Issues

VI. Milwaukee County and Wisconsin Budgets

Idzikowski notes that the Wisconsin biennial and annual County budget processes are now underway. The Governor has asked Wisconsin departments to submit their budgets to him for consideration in order to formulate the Executive Budget that he will present to the state legislature by the third Tuesday in January. Notes that this is an important time to communicate the aging network's budget priorities to the Governor.

Idzikowski notes the County Board of Supervisors Budget hearing schedule and instructions on how to participate in these hearings on CLIC along with a summary of how to comment on individual items was included in the materials.

Commissioner Pumphrey turns attention to the County Executive's proposal within the proposed County budget to merge the Milwaukee County Department on Aging into the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services. Pumphrey states that he does not understand why this merger is being approved. Pumphrey states that he does not understand why this merger is being approved. Pumphrey states that he does not understand why this merger is being proposed, given that the Department was already doing a good job addressing the elements of the Aging plan and it doesn't appear that this will actually save any money.

Concerned that we don't spend enough time on important issues such as the Wisconsin and Milwaukee County budget since we only meet once per month.

Moeser reiterates the importance of advocating for Wisconsin to accept Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, since this program provides funding for many Milwaukee County seniors through long term care and health insurance coverage.

Moeser comments that it is reasonable and prudent for the County Executive to consider restructuring of the Department on Aging and folding it into DHHS. There is nothing wrong with reviewing how to reorganize and improve services to our seniors and that is what this budget does. He is not interested in proposals that increase bureaucracy and inefficiency and so if the County budget helps us to improve and increase services, we should look at that. Moeser believes that the County has been transparent with us. If this Committee already took action nine months ago opposing this move, then there already has been discussion on this matter since January.

Mikolajczyk states that he is confused as to why the County is proposing this merger and eliminating an Executive Director when the state statute requires it.

Izard clarifies that the statutory requirement is not to have an Executive Director of a Department on Aging. Rather, Wisconsin Statute 46.82 requires a full-time director of a county unit on aging. Izard believes that the current plan does include a full-time director of the unit on aging within DHHS.

Hoffmann states that he has been involved with the Commission on Aging for twenty years and this proposal to merge the Department on Aging into a larger department has been advanced several times, always with the justification that it will save money. Hoffmann does not believe it will actually save money, but rather that it will disenfranchise older adults. The AAA is not primarily a services organization, it is primarily an advocacy organization to advance the voices of older adults in the County and advance their well-being.

Izard notes that the state manual governing the Aging Network references the "aging difference" 41 times – that is the idea that aging programs and services are directed by the older adult population served and this is a very different model than other social service delivery systems. Izard pointed this out to the County Executive, but his response was that they were moving forward with the merger. This concern has been presented and rejected by the County Executive. However, this merger cannot move forward without the consent of the County Board.

Pumphrey agrees that the aging community is a unique community and that the Department is primarily an empowerment agency, not a service delivery agency. Other populations have tremendous problems and Pumphrey is worried that the funding the County provides for older adults will be diverted to other populations

Pumphrey states it is important to state the Commission's concerns with the elimination of the Executive Director position directly to the County Executive. The Commission has some degree of autonomy and authority. If there is ever a time the Commission should be heard it is now. Pumphrey encourages members to contact their County Supervisor regarding this point.

Moeser notes that he is also a lifelong resident of Milwaukee County and a senior and he wants a high quality of life. He believes that merger with a larger department will lead to enhanced services and will allow the aging programs to operate without budget cuts.

Izard recommends that the chair recognize Stephanie Sue Stein to comment on this issue.

Moeser calls the question on Mikolajczyk's motion.

Chair recognizes Stephanie Sue Stein for two minutes. Stein notes that her perception is that the problem has been that major decisions have been made about the Department on Aging without the input of the Commission on Aging. The major role of an Area Agency on Aging is not to provide services, but advocacy, leadership, community involvement, and planning to best meet the needs of older adults. It is not impossible that this couldn't happen in a merged Department, but it is necessary to determine the accountability within a new structure to ensure that the voice of the Commission and the older adult community is heard.

MOTION: That the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging communicate to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors its support for maintaining a separate and independent Milwaukee County Department on Aging and opposing merger as a unit within the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services.

ACTION: Motion carries, Moeser opposes (Mikolajczk, Hoffman).

VII. Announcements and Advocacy Opportunities

The Aging and Disability Resource Center Governing Board is conducting a survey of services provided by the ARC/DRC and the Long Term Care system.

A survey can be found online at: <https://county.milwaukee.gov/aging/adrcboardsurvey> or request a paper version by calling (414) 289-6874.

Census 2020 was extended by federal court and is now scheduled to end this month. Please remind all people to participate in the Census.

Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force 2020 Karen Avery Forum

Housing: Opportunities, Rights and Resources ~Awards Presentation~

Tuesday, October 13, 2020 2:30 – 5 PM

- [View the forum flyer](#) for information on the agenda, speakers, awards, continuing education and how to request disability related accommodations for the forum.
- Register for the forum now at <http://www.milwaukeeemhtf.org/2020/09/07/2020forum/>
- **Housing Forum Survey:** Share your input on the questions you want our speakers to address, or to include in the resource packet for our October 13th forum, Housing: Opportunities, Rights, and Resources. [Take the survey.](#)

VIII. Future agenda items & meeting dates

- **WAAN** (Thursday, November 5th at 9:30a.m.)
- **ADRC Governing Board Listening Session** (Wed, October 14th 2:00pm – 3:30pm) Host Independence First. Register: bpeters@independencefirst.org or (414) 937-5912.

IX. Adjourn

MOTION: Adjourn the meeting.

ACTION: Unanimous (Mikolajczyk, Troestler).

The Advocacy Committee meeting adjourned at 3:11 PM. The next Advocacy Committee meeting will be held by videoconference on Monday, October 5, 2020, at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Idzikowski
Program and Policy Coordinator