



DFL Senior Caucus Testimony MN Task Force on Aging

Date: September 17, 2024
To: Legislative Task Force on Aging
Representative Ginny Klevorn, Chair

My name is Kay Hendrikson, Chair of the statewide DFL Senior Caucus. I'm here to speak on behalf of 900 senior citizens in the DFL Senior Caucus who count on you to make their lives better.

WHO IS THE DFL SENIOR CAUCUS

The DFL Senior Caucus is a volunteer organization that supports senior citizens and their families. We are 900 members strong across the state of MN, including rural, urban, and suburban individuals. We have 10 local chapters that interact with a grassroots level of individual people daily. The DFL Senior Caucus has been advocating for these non-partisan issues since its inception almost 20 years ago, including:

- Affordable and safe housing
- Transportation
- Affordable, quality health care
- Fair prices for prescription drug coverage
- Protection of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security programs
- Safe, livable communities
- Healthful environment to pass on to our children and grandchildren
- Critical services expansion to seniors

PROBLEMS WE HEAR FROM GRASSROOTS SENIOR CITIZENS

The Senior Caucus members interact daily with members and nonmembers alike. Individually and collectively our informal interactions tell us the following:

- Services and access to services are severely under resourced; there appears to be no power of enforcement of these services.
- There appears to be little collaboration across state and local departments.
- There appears to be no clear entity in Minnesota that has authority to advocate for and oversee a comprehensive statewide, cross agency picture of aging needs and services in MN.

- It appears as if no one is fully in charge of planning across all state and local agencies for the demographic changes we are experiencing that are needed to support and optimize the value that our elder citizens bring to our communities.

Most people we talk to do not understand how the complex web of health care encompasses home supports, long term care, social services, housing and community services interact and link to each other. To most people, the system feels fragmented and confusing and very hard to navigate. People should not need to be social services experts --- they should be able to get help easily and affordably.

“Aging is not a human services delivery issue -- this is a societal issue.”

SOLUTIONS WE PROPOSE

The Senior Caucus proposes that the Minnesota legislature define a commissioner or entity within the Minnesota state government, who belongs to the governor's cabinet to propose and oversee with authority, state and local programs in support of the state's senior population. This entity must have a budget sufficient enough to carry out the entity's activities. The entity will present recommendations to the Minnesota state legislature, the governor's office, the affected departments within state government, and to local officials and community boards. This entity must have the authority to lobby for action on those recommendations and evaluate results.

This requires a shared vision, broad policy, and operational longevity.

This cabinet level person or entity must care about people who are elderly and must be able to influence the budget and regulate and enforce statewide policy. This person or entity must advocate for an “inclusive community vs single purpose communities.”

The Senior Caucus has long supported and advocated these non-partisan solutions. Here are our recommendations:

- Simplify access to existing senior services
 - By streamlining the application process and eligibility requirements
- Increase awareness of existing senior services
 - Through increased public information and education on available services, supports and resources for older people, families, and the general public.
- Increase options for affordable in-home services
 - To allow older Minnesotans to remain at home.
- Develop affordable insurance options to support middle income older Minnesotans
 - Who are not eligible for Medicaid benefits as they age and require more care.
- Address healthcare workforce shortages
 - In primary care and direct care services; in urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Develop rural, suburban, and urban transportation policies

- That accommodate older people's needs.
- Expand affordable housing options for older people in a variety of settings rural, suburban, and urban
 - To meet their preferences and needs.
- End age discrimination **End age discrimination**
 - And recognize the value that older people bring to the economy.
- Combat isolation
 - Through socialization and community involvement opportunities that support healthy aging.

SUMMARY

We need a cabinet level leadership position, with authority, with oversight, and with adequate budget to accomplish these very necessary functions.

The DFL Senior Caucus speaks in support of the nonpartisan basic framework laid out by others:

- Cabinet level leadership to provide a direct line of communication to the governor and its office to be a strong advocate for seniors' interests, to coordinate policy across all state agencies, and have funding sources relevant to seniors.
- Provide staff and resources to support advocacy, oversight, and cross-agency coordination.

We believe taking these steps will increase our understanding of what resources we currently have, identify gaps that need to be addressed, and provide the quickest track to a more focused and comprehensive plan for addressing these ongoing and inevitable demographic changes.

These steps will also help to continue the work that has begun to build inclusive communities that support and value the richness that older adults bring. This will assist in provision of options to older adults in order to meet their needs and preferences across the lifespan.

Thank you to the Task Force on Aging, Rep Jinny Klevorn, and all of the entities trying to improve the lives of MN senior citizens.

Respectfully submitted
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