

Sep 12 2024

To: Andrew George

From: Mary Jo Schifsky

RE: Sep 17 Legislative Task Force Testimony

State of Minnesota Department of Community Aging

When Governor Walz appointed me to the Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA) in 2019, I believed I was joining an entity focused on policy and planning for aging in MN. After a brief time, I realized, of the eight duties outlined in Statute 256.975 Minnesota Board on Aging which established the MBA, only duty #7 and #8 were the focus of the work for the twenty-five volunteer Board members. Duties 1-6, including advising the Governor, coordinating aging within other state departments, creating public awareness, and serving as a focal point for disseminating information were not in our purview. The statute does not mention planning for the growth of the older adult population to optimize its well-being or contribution to the economy or to minimize any potential negative impact.

The community perceives the MBA as performing **all** the duties within the statute. Duties performed are completed by state staff, not by MBA members. In my personal experience, colleagues within the aging community asked why MBA is not providing the leadership its stature warrants. Although many responses to this question are possible (capacity, funding, etc.), I had no answer.

The MBA recommendations to the Legislative Task Force on Aging (September, 2024), recognize this reality in this statement *“a new platform to support coordination and advocacy for aging across state government is needed”*. The MBA report recommends the creation of a **New & Renewed Aging Entity**, outlining specific responsibilities, financial resources, and the role of a volunteer advisory committee. A new entity which would remain housed within DHS, in a structural arrangement that is not conducive to planning or leadership.

Elder Voice Advocates and others propose a cabinet-level State of MN Department of Community Aging. I support this proposal.