



To: The MN Legislative Task Force on Aging
From: Elder Voice Advocates
Date: September 17, 2024
Re: MBA Statement Recommendation to the Legislative Task Force on Aging

The Minnesota Board on Aging's (MBA) 'Recommendations to the Legislative Task Force on Aging' misleadingly suggests that Elder Voice Advocates collaborated closely and endorsed their recommendations. By listing Elder Voice Advocates among organizations involved in "extensive small group discussions and consultations," the MBA implies that Elder Voice Advocates had a significant role in shaping their conclusions.

We want to make it clear to all and especially to the members of this Task Force, that Elder Voice Advocates was not a collaborator with MBA and their partners, and is opposed to their recommendations.

This inaccurate and misleading characterization is of concern for several reasons:

1. **Implied Endorsement and Consensus:** The MBA's statement wrongly implies that Elder Voice Advocates actively engaged in shaping their recommendations and supports them. In reality, Elder Voice Advocates only responded to a request for a virtual meeting and has a fundamentally different recommendation that has been in place since February 2024.
2. **Misleading Representation of Stakeholder Input:** Grouping Elder Voice Advocates with other the other MBA collaborators listed in their document mislead readers into thinking Elder Voice Advocates provided substantial input, thus affecting perceptions of the proposal's support among advocacy groups.
3. **Undermining Elder Voice Advocates Independent Recommendations:** This misrepresentation undermines Elder Voice Advocates independent advocacy, including our strong recommendation for a Minnesota Department for Community Aging, by falsely suggesting we align with the MBA's position.

It is essential to clarify this to protect the integrity of Elder Voice Advocates stance and highlight our distinct recommendation for a Department for Community Aging.

In contrast, the MBA recommendation, falls short, merely rearranging existing bureaucracies who are focused on self-preservation, business interests and not the interests of older citizens. We don't need regulators and business interests but rather innovators, which are not the other organizations noted in their recommendations.

The MBA proposal emphasizes inclusivity and diverse representation, but there is no clear strategy for ensuring that the voices of older adults, especially marginalized and underrepresented groups, are genuinely included in decision-making processes. In fact, this

proposal is industry conceived. There is no true consideration and inclusion of older Minnesotans.

An elder-centered Department for Community Aging holds several advantages:

1. **Prioritizes the Needs of Elders:** Elders understand firsthand the challenges and complexities of aging, and their involvement ensures that policies and programs are designed to address real-world issues that affect them. An elder-centered department would prioritize the well-being, independence, and dignity of older adults rather than industry objectives, which are placed above the needs of older citizens.
2. **Avoids Conflicts of Interest:** Industry-led entities will be influenced by commercial interests, such as long-term care providers or insurance companies. Their decisions could prioritize financial gain or operational efficiency over the actual needs of elders. A department that is elder centered would be free from such conflicts, focusing solely on the interests of the aging population.
3. **Incorporates Lived Experience:** Elders bring lived experience to the table, offering insights that professionals in the industry might overlook. Their involvement ensures that policies are realistic and effective in addressing the social, health, and emotional aspects of aging.
4. **Empowers the Aging Population:** An elder-centered initiative empowers older adults by giving them a direct voice in shaping the systems and services that affect them. This fosters a sense of autonomy and respect, contrasting with an industry-led approach that might treat elders as passive recipients of care.
5. **Community-Centered Solutions:** A department for community aging that is elder centered will foster community-based solutions that promote aging in community, intergenerational relationships, and local support networks. Industry-led initiatives, on the other hand, will focus more on institutional care models that might not align with elders' desires to remain in their communities.
6. **Long-Term Sustainability:** By focusing on the real needs and preferences of elders, a department centered on them is more likely to create sustainable policies that evolve as the population ages, ensuring the long-term effectiveness of aging-related services and infrastructure.
7. **Credibility in the Eyes of Elders:** To gain the respect, trust, and active support of the elder community, it is crucial that the Task Force's recommendations are not only innovative but also deeply rooted in the needs and perspectives of older adults. By centering the voices of elders in these decisions, the Task Force can demonstrate a genuine commitment to serving and empowering the very people it is entrusted to protect.

In summary, Elder Voice Advocates emphatically opposes both the Minnesota Board on Aging's misrepresentation of our role and their recommendations to the Legislative Task Force on Aging. We did not endorse their proposal, and we strongly oppose it, as it fails to address the critical needs of Minnesota's older adults. Our independent, elder-led vision prioritizes the dignity, well-being, and empowerment of elders, free from undue industry influence and outdated bureaucratic practices. We remain committed to advancing a solution that truly reflects the voices and needs of older Minnesotans.