



Legislative Task Force
A State Department on Aging
October 9, 2024

As a County Commissioner I am familiar with bureaucracies, organizational structure, the resistance to change and the politics of change. I am also familiar with the many successes and profound effects on people's lives that an organization can have when it operates on a positive and affirming culture that is at the core of its purpose. Such is the culture that Minnesota has created for children. Minnesota values children and demonstrates it in many ways. Children receive a continuum of care that starts before they are born and continues through infancy, early childhood, pre-teen and late teens. The culture of caring for children that Minnesota has created assures that they are protected from disease, disabling injuries, harm and abuse.

Unfortunately, this is not the case with the elderly. As the demographics of Minnesota changed, developing a positive and affirmative culture of aging failed to develop. Unlike the culture that developed for children, the elderly have been left with the false belief that they can "take care of themselves." Simultaneously, Ageism¹ developed, not through malicious intent but as a result of an absence of a positive and affirmative culture of aging.

In my role as a commissioner, I know that counties can be efficient in how they operate. However, there is no capacity in any county bureaucracy to develop all the programs that will be needed to meet the needs of an aging population. One of the many reasons why Minnesota must establish a cabinet level position on Aging is that it will begin the process of establishing a culture which will engender our aging population. And, in the same manner a state department does for children, it will create the mandates and funding stream that will allow counties to begin developing the culture and programming needed for the elderly. That is why I am here today. I urge this taskforce to recommend the establishment of a State Department on Aging and the planning process. This task force gives Minnesota the opportunity to set forth an historic course of action. Let us move forward boldly.

¹ Prominent anti-ageist Ashton Applewhite describes ageism as serving "a social and economic purpose: to legitimize and sustain inequalities between groups. It's not about how we look. It's about how people in power assign meaning to how we look.

https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton_applewhite_let_s_end_ageism?language=en#t-679920