

**Testimony to the Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging**

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Madame Chair and Members of the Task Force,

My name is Georgia Lane; I work as a Senior Planner in Aging Services for the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging, serving Northeastern MN. I have worked in aging services for 20 years. Like many of us here today, aging is both professional and personal. I was the 5<sup>th</sup> generation to be raised on our dairy farm in central Minnesota. Daily, I watch my family as they grow older in both rural and urban areas. I am in the “sandwich generation” as I care for my two children, a brother-in-law with autism, and a mother-in-law with dementia. Suffice it to say I understand the complexities of navigating the systems.

Many of us agree that aging as a priority has not been elevated to the extent it needs. We need an all-hands-on-deck approach to making changes Minnesota has a proven track record to come together to get work done. I reflect on the work that was accomplished through initiatives like Act on Alzheimer’s--Let’s build on these experiences.

The Age-Friendly MN Council was charged by you, the Legislature, to lead the development of Minnesota’s multisector blueprint on aging. This has spurred action across the state. There are three ways I see Age-Friendly Minnesota efforts having an impact:

1) **The first is through entities seeking formal Age-Friendly designations.** We now have:

- 26 communities with an Age-Friendly designation under the World Health Organization umbrella
- 3 Universities under the Age-Friendly University Global Network
- 36 Age-Friendly health systems under Institute for Health Improvement,
- 1 pioneer Age-Friendly public health system (my local St. Louis County Public Health) through Trust for America’s Health.

I have heard the concern about pigeonholing Minnesota’s efforts within the AARP framework. **However- it is vital we recognize the broader Age-Friendly ecosystem that has been established. These networks are a global movement we want to align with- not distance ourselves from.** By branding the work being accomplished in Minnesota as Age-Friendly, we fold our work into a common vernacular and allows us to move in the same direction. If this task force recommends that we form a new entity unrelated to the Age-Friendly brand I

fear we will not only take a step backward, but miss the opportunity to capitalize on the tremendous amount of work being done.

- 2) **The second way we're having an impact is through the Age Friendly Minnesota Community grants.** I have seen communities making practical, meaningful changes. Communities know best what they need. Statewide, there has been nearly \$20Million requested, with approximately \$4.3M to grant out. This is clear evidence that demand is there, and communities understand the scope of work that can occur this umbrella. Because of these grants, local public health has been engaged. I would like to elevate the work of Cook, Lake, and St. Louis County Public Health departments for being exemplary models.
- 3) **The third impact area is the Multisector Blueprint on Aging.** Work is underway to develop a national plan on aging, and Minnesota is joining 20+ states who are developing and implementing these plans. Over 3,200 Minnesotans have been engaged in forming our blueprint. To deny that work has gone into this blueprint, or that thousands of Minnesotans have been engaged, is a mischaracterization. The blueprint offers us a structure to work across state and local entities.

**My ask for you today is this: In the event a new state Department on Aging is established, I urge you to make the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council work central to this department. We ought not to sunset this work. Rather, we should elevate, empower, and mobilize the work happening on many levels through the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council. Unfortunately, the Council is woefully under-resourced and is set to sunset in 2027 without your intervention. I ask for the permanency of this council, so that we can build on the progress made to date.**

Commented [RS1]: could you change this to "unit"?

When I speak with local elected officials and community members aging is a **non-partisan issue**. It is refreshing to find an issue that we all agree on. With the right support, the AFMN Council can drive this work forward. I have followed the work of this task force closely and thank you for your leadership, as well as the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you.