



November 19, 2024

Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging
Andrew George, Task Force Administrator
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Members of the Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging,

The Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging (m4a) comprises the six regional Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). The AAAs are independent nonprofit or quasi-governmental organizations. m4a collaborates across AAAs and with other organizations and agencies to foster systemic changes to support older adults and caregivers.

As designated recipients of federal Older Americans Act (OAA) funding, AAAs are leaders in aging services through our planning and service areas that cover all 87 counties in Minnesota. The work we do to advocate, plan, coordinate, improve access to information, and administer federal funding for services is designed to assist older individuals and caregivers to live meaningful, healthy, and dignified lives in their communities. AAAs are a key component of the aging network alongside local service providers, the Office of Long-term Care Ombudsman program, Title VI funding to Native American Tribes, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program, all of which were established under the Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965.

AAAs prioritize the development of services and innovations to fill gaps, and advocate at the systems level for older adults and family caregivers. AAAs assist service providers to strengthen service design and delivery through technical assistance, as well as work across the public and private sectors to engage communities, serve as a neutral source of information, and ensure stewardship of Federal and State funding.

m4a appreciates the work that the Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging (Task Force) has been doing over the past year and a half. The Task Force's priority to focus advocates, providers, older adults, caregivers, and lawmakers on improving the experience of aging in our state has been well received. Lori Vrolson, Executive Director of Central Minnesota Council on Aging (CMCOA), provided one of the first testimonies to the Task Force on August 24, 2023.

m4a has reviewed the proposal that Representative Ginny Klevorn presented to the Task Force on October 29, 2024. The proposal summarizes the work the Task Force has completed thus far. m4a humbly submits our recommendations on the proposal.

1. **Establish an Administration on Aging under DHS with an appointed Assistant Commissioner:** Creating a department led by an Assistant Commissioner would elevate aging issues and facilitate alignment with other state agencies to engage in the collaborative development of policies and initiatives that impact older adults and the communities that serve them. The State Administration on Aging would include the State Unit on Aging (SUA), Long-term Care Ombudsman and Age Friendly Council at a minimum. The role of this entity would continue and help expand the capacity of a statewide, user-friendly public information system, such as the Senior LinkAge Line, that would streamline navigation for older adults and their families. Availability of this service is essential for connecting older adults, caregivers, and providers to unbiased, essential information for services and supports. This includes benefits such as MNChoice Assessments, Medicare, housing information, and social connection opportunities.
2. **Integrate Statewide Coordination with Regional Responsiveness:** A strong partnership between the State Unit on Aging (SUA) and AAAs will support the coordinated system that balances state oversight with local flexibility. m4a recommends that this department strengthen cross-agency collaboration to enable the AAAs to continue delivering region-specific services while contributing to statewide goals for aging well. The department

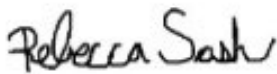
would also oversee age-friendly initiatives for seamless coordination and integration of grassroots innovations into state policy and practice.

3. **Developing a Collaborative State Plan on Aging and Multi-Sector Blueprint:** Coordinating age-friendly initiatives across key agencies (e.g., DHS, MDH, MNDOT, Commerce, Housing, DEED, and Education) with a greater degree of authority vested in an assistant commissioner is a moderate first step in what could later become a more dramatic change to establish a new commissioner led state agency on aging. Work should continue to fully develop and implement a multi-sector, data-driven “Statewide Blueprint for Aging” that aligns aging policies with local expertise, aiming to address the unique challenges faced by older adults in rural, suburban, and urban areas alike. By setting measurable goals and monitoring progress, this Blueprint can ensure a continuous improvement approach to aging services that addresses gaps and implements necessary improvements.
4. **Embed Principles of Equity and Combat Ageism Across State Department Policies** Embedding DEI throughout all initiatives is essential. A focus on combating ageism would serve as a unifying factor across disparate entities that compete for resources and would demonstrate a holistic commitment to older adults. Policies should aim to combat ageism, support longevity, support community and workforce inclusion for older adults, and provide specialized training programs for working across sectors with older adults.
5. **Expand Public-Private Partnerships and Strengthen Community-Based Services:** The proposed aging administration would work with private sector organizations, non-profits, and community groups to support aging well in the community, family caregiving, and workforce development. This approach will bring additional resources and innovative solutions to aging services across the state.

By implementing these recommendations, the proposed structure will be well-positioned to help phase in a more robust, responsive system that serves Minnesota’s aging population with efficiency, compassion, and inclusivity. We are confident that developing a structure with an Assistant Commissioner on Aging and emphasizing the collaborative relationship between the SUA and AAAs will help establish a model of aging services that better meets the needs of all Minnesotans.

m4a is grateful for the work that Task Force members and the staff have done to identify needs and current and best practices within Minnesota and the nation. It is time to strengthen our approach and support all Minnesotans to age with good health, income security and an appreciation for their contributions to our communities.

Respectfully,



Rebecca Sash, Director, Arrowhead Agency on Aging



Lori Vrolson, Executive Director, Central Minnesota Council on Aging



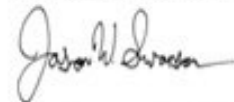
Heather Pender, Director, Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging



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