

Representative Klevorn and the members of the Minnesota Task Force on Aging

Dear Members:

I write this letter as a citizen of Minnesota and not as a representative of the DFL Senior Caucus. I along with a few others formed the DFL Senior Caucus in 2006 because many of the needs and issues listed in the Task Force Final Report were visible then from the rapidly increasing senior demographic. Though the Minnesota legislature has somewhat addressed those issues, we still find ourselves in 2024 having a legislative task force take a broader look at what can and must be done. Hopefully, some of task force recommendations can be put in place, but unfortunately the political environment we have today suggests difficulties.

I should note that I agree in principal with the task force objectives and in general its conclusions. A cabinet-level office for addressing senior issues and managing a state-level respond would be welcome. A colleague of mine, who had many years experience in state government agencies, only questions placing this new office under the Department of Management and Budget, a department intended to make government agencies more efficient and now necessarily to address new issues and needs. But that is an issue the legislature can correct as needed.

My principal concern is whether under our current political environment a new government agency is even possible. Certainly the election of a federal Trump administration suggests that no federal support will be given for a new state agency. Indeed, the incoming federal administration plans to sharply reduce federal support and expects Internet billionaires to find programs to cut. So it will be up to the state to find the funds and resources to support this new agency, but currying support from the public for such expense looks to be a challenge. Even in an atmosphere of legislative bonhomie, opposing political forces will be looking for cuts here, there, and everywhere and cutting new expenditure would seem an easy target. Much of the voting public unfortunately appears to be in agreement.

Even if accepted by the legislature, development of a new state agency will also take some time to find and recruit leadership and the agency staff. It seems unlikely that the agency could be ready to testify to the legislature until well into the 2026 legislative session. But seniors a struggling now and may be in even more difficulty if the incoming federal government cuts support. Seniors can't wait too long.

The question remains how the work of the task force can proceed to services quickly. Certainly, outside groups or already funded working groups like the Board on Aging and the Area Agencies on Aging can keep some needed work going. But they are limited in what they can do and cannot easily propose to do more. Therefore, keeping the task force findings in the legislature's vision and achieving necessary support is the immediate question. There is still much work for task force supporters to do.

Sincerely, James Reed
Concerned citizen