

Testimony of Leif Grina
President of the Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council
Minnesota Legislative Task Force on Aging, March 8, 2024

The Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council is a constituent organization of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation. We are comprised of some 18 local and regional union retiree organizations and individuals who support our purpose.

We join with Elder Voices Family Advocates in calling on the task force to work toward creating a Minnesota Department of Community Aging.

Why “Community Aging”? The majority of elders strongly desire to age in their homes and communities. This desire coincidentally makes good sense from an economic perspective as well for our physical, mental and emotional health as we age.

Why a department ?

We all know that our population is rapidly aging and this has enormous implications for housing, health care, transportation and recreation.

Although the state has initiated and supported a number of policies and programs to support our aging population these are scattered among a number of departments, boards and agencies. We are in need of coordination and integration of resources into a strategic plan.

As I stated a moment ago- aging in place as long as possible, is cost effective in relation to institutionalization but we do not have ‘Aging in Community an Place’ as policy objective.

We know that ageism, an issue that the task force needs to address, is the last form of bias and discrimination that remains socially and politically acceptable. This needs to change and we need leadership to move this change- ageism costs the US economy an estimated 850 billion dollars; the health care cost of ageism, according one study, is estimated at 63 billion dollars.

Our aging population remains a vital asset to our communities and our state- elders in Minnesota are the largest resource of child care in the state; we are a huge volunteer workforce providing folks engaged in a wide variety of valuable efforts from feeding the hungry to manning our polling places.

We need a department because we need to develop strategies, policies and programs to coordinate investment in our people as we age.

And why not create a new department?

One argument will be Minnesota that does not need another bureaucracy. But the truth is we already have one- it is scattered now among several different departments, boards and bureaus in need of coordination and focus.

We can anticipate the argument that we can't afford it. But we are already spending a large sum of money in a response to the challenges we face. Spending that is not coordinated and strategic and does not address the underlying challenge of ageism.

It is clear to our Council that Minnesota will benefit greatly from a department charged with developing and implementing strategies, programs and policies to insure investment and a strong foundation for our future.

We urge you to remember- we are all aging- this is not about a population in need, it is about our commitment and investment in the future of all Minnesotans.