

COMMENTS TO THE LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AGING

APRIL 12, 2024

Since we were established in 2004, the Delegates of the **Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging** have held an unwavering commitment to creating communities and systems that support aging with dignity and a spirit of well-being in our state. While our 32 non-profit member organizations bring distinct areas of expertise across the aging sector, we also work collectively to champion systems change. Today, we come in appreciation of the momentum for change created by your Task Force and in support of efforts to replace outdated practices with new, smarter ways of doing things.

Considering discussions and testimony that you've already heard, we seek to amplify a few key themes:

- First, we recognize the shared priority of **elevating aging within state government** and share a commitment to replace outdated systems and practices with improved approaches. *We're all aging and must do our part to elevate aging as a state priority.*
- Second, we acknowledge **Minnesota's reputation as a national leader in aging**. When given opportunities, our sector has a tradition of bringing forward solutions-oriented, innovative, and collaborative thought leadership. *Working together, we can get big goals accomplished.*
- Third, we must **champion diverse, equitable, and inclusive communities in which to age**. While our state is consistently ranked a great place to age generally, we must all continue our intentional work to end ageism and the health, economic, and social disparities faced by communities of color, tribal governments, as well as LGBTQ and rural communities.

We also come forward today to share some thoughts on the focus of your forthcoming report.

- **First, we ask the Task Force to make permanent the Age-Friendly Minnesota Council** and to recommend the needed authority and funding to remain the lead entity coordinating nine state agencies, tribal governments, and thousands of community members in a 10-year, multi-sector Blueprint, as well as enhance grantmaking efforts in communities across our state. *Without legislative action, this crucial work will sunset in 2027.*
- **Next, we urge prioritization of essential investments**, including safety net programs like Medical Assistance and the full continuum of Long-Term Services and Supports that help us age in our communities. Coordination across Medicaid, state-funded programs, and Older Americans Act resources must address access to Home and Community-Based Services, such as personal care, home care, care management, adult day services, home modifications, assistive technologies, respite, nutrition services, transportation, and other caregiver supports wherever people call home. Systems must address the growing need for affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing and health services across rural, urban, and tribal communities. *Success will be dependent on meeting the needs of both family and career caregivers in all our communities.*
- **Finally, we must advance innovative system redesign initiatives**, including the strategic paths featured in the *Own Your Future* reports and efforts to break down silos, invest in new technologies, or evaluate the government structures needed to improve effectiveness and elevate aging as a state priority. *We believe big solutions are best when co-designed.*

In conclusion, we stand ready to collaborate in positively transforming aging in Minnesota. Together, we have an important opportunity to advance meaningful, person-centered, equity-focused, data-driven changes that will benefit each of us as we age. Thank you for this time, for your dedication, and we look forward to continued partnership and progress.

Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging:

Adam Suomala, Executive Director
Minnesota Leadership Council on Aging

Cathy McLeer, *State Director*
AARP Minnesota

Robert Freeman, *Vice President, Public Policy*
Alzheimer's Association MN/ND

Kimelyn Knight, *Director of Aging Services*
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

Toby Pearson, *President and CEO*
Care Providers of Minnesota

Patricia McArdle, *Director of Aging and Disability Services*, **Catholic Charities Twin Cities**

Ann Bailey, *President*, **DARTS**

Katey Zanutelli-Wade, *Senior Director of Aging and Economic Security*, **East Side Neighborhood Services**

Beth Wiggins, *Director of Caregiving and Aging Services*, **FamilyMeans**

James Falvey, *Executive Director*
Friends & Co.

Ruth Hampton Olkon, *Chief Executive Officer*
Jewish Family Services of St. Paul

Kari Thurlow, *President and CEO*
LeadingAge Minnesota

Kristin Rigg, *Executive Director*
Living at Home Network

Tory Merhar, *Associate Vice President of Older Adults*
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Patrick Rowan, *Executive Director*
Meals on Wheels

Jarrod Peterson, *Public Policy Chair/President*
Minneapolis Area Senior Workers Association and St. Paul Senior Workers Association

Dawn Simonson, *President and CEO*, **Trellis Minnesota Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

George Schoephoerster, *Past President*
MN Association of Geriatrics Inspired Clinicians

Paula Woischke, *Director, Whitney Senior Ctr.*
Minnesota Association of Senior Services

Amanda Vickstrom, *Executive Director*
Minnesota Elder Justice Center

Heidi Holste, *Executive Director*
Minnesota Gerontological Society

Kathy Messerli, *Executive Director*
Minnesota Home Care Association

David Blomquist, *Interim Executive Director*
Minnesota Network of Hospice & Palliative Care

Phil Duran, *Director of Advocacy and Community Engagement*, **Rainbow Health**

Deb Taylor, *Chief Executive Officer*
Senior Community Services

Jane Pederson, *Chief Medical Quality Officer*
Stratis Health

Vickie Snyder, *Chair, Board of Directors*
Vital Aging Network

Julie Manworren, *President and CEO*
Volunteers of America – MN and WI