

Aging Task Force Testimony

9-12-2023

Madame Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Leif Grina. I am 71 years old and I'm the President of the Minneapolis Regional Retirees Council a constituent body of the Minneapolis regional Labor Federation. We are an organization of some 19 local and regional union retiree organizations in Hennepin County and the counties north, and west.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and hope to shed some light on who we, elders, are and how would like to be seen.

Aging is a journey along a continuum. As we experience it our abilities change. But because how we are seen is largely framed by ageism- we are too often seen as being on a fixed point on that continuum- we are 'too old'. But our stories and some interesting data tell a different story about who we are, and what we do, and what we are capable of as we age.

I remember when my first grandchild was in elementary school my wife and I picked him up after school- there were many gray haired elders lined up in front of the school like us.

My wife and his other grandfather volunteered to read to students in an after school program and help them as they learned to read. Elders in Minnesota like us are a huge resource for child care.

Like many we volunteer in our community. At Loaves and Fishes we help with the preparation and distribution of meals to families struggling with the results of economic inequality. With few exceptions our fellow volunteers are elders like us. We are a enormous resource of volunteer labor, deeply engaged in our communities.

Where I vote I most of the election judges are elders like me. We are very much engaged in our civic life.

But Ageism tells a different story about us

We are dependent and in need of support and services; we are old and cranky, absent minded and befuddled. We often feel patronized as a result

We are "old" is a frame that implies that we are mentally and physically in need of caring and charity. Age has become an arbitrary criteria for judging ability and fitness for a variety of roles in our communities regardless of individual mental or physical capability

Ageism is not about who we are but is a cultural construct that like racism and sexism, serves to marginalize us politically, socially and economically

But there is some interesting data that tells a different story.

For example we are the largest resource for after school child care in the state. In a report by the Minnesota Department of Human Services in 2009, Grandparents had the highest rate of child care in the resource of family, friends and neighbors, itself the highest utilized category, providing 35% of the child care overall - as high as 56% for youngest children

We are also a huge unpaid workforce in our communities in addition to providing child care. The 2021 Americorp Volunteering Report noted that in the United States Older adults- those 55 and over - had the highest rates of formal volunteering - within an organization and informal volunteering, outside a formal organization. The informal rate for elders aged 60 - 79 was over 58%. It is interesting to note that the rate of informal helping rises as we age.

Here in Minnesota, according to a report by COMPASS, 39% of Minnesota Elders volunteer through formal organizations. There are more than 1.6 million minnesotans over the age of 55- a volunteer workforce of about 650,000 people.

We are very engaged in our democracy in Voting and Voting administration

Elders vote in greater percentages than any other demographic age group in the state. Data from the Minnesota Secretary of State shows that voting participation rises as people age reaching a peak of 80% for those between 70 and 74

In the 2018 general election, around six-in-ten U.S. poll workers (58%) were ages 61 and older, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of government data from that year's [Election Administration and Voting Survey](#)

And we have an enormous economic impact resulting from what we earned during our paid working years. A Minnesota House research report for 2023 states that for the tax year 2019 Social security alone brought in \$14,619,000,000.

So what do we want?

To be appreciated and valued for what we have contributed to our communities and what we continue to contribute.

To age in the comfort and security of our homes and communities.

To have the diversity of elders in terms of capability and engagement in the life of our state recognized independent of some arbitrary notion of "too old":

We want to be seen and known for who we are and what we do and where we are on the continuum of aging and not for the number of times we have been privileged to circle the sun.

As we age we do decline and we do need support and services just as we do when we are very young. But Minnesota also needs to see it's commitment to our elders as an investment in a valuable and valued population.