



Statement of

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Chair

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Special Committee on Aging
U.S. Senate**

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Senator Franken thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Minnesota Board on Aging and to discuss the Older Americans Act, its important impact on older Minnesotans and their families, and opportunities we see with the reauthorization.

Here in Minnesota – as in states across the country – we are beginning to experience the age wave. Many of our rural counties already have populations with significant proportions of older adults. On January 1, 2011 the first of the baby boomers begins turning 65. By 2020, Minnesota will have more retirees than school age children, with this will come a significantly lower labor force growth rate. At the same time, our population is becoming much more diverse. These demographic changes present real challenges – and opportunities for our state. The needs of older Minnesotans are diverse – they do not fit into one category – they are dynamic and dependent on geography, income, literacy and health status to name a few.

Within that context I want to speak with you today about three themes that reflect key areas of our work over the past several years and the recommendations we have for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. The themes are:

- Supporting our Area Agencies on Aging to meet the growing needs of an aging population with fewer resources;
- Engaging in public and private partnerships to expand our home and community-based service capacity; and
- Strengthening our programs and services to support self direction and ensure the rights of older Minnesotans.

Minnesota Board on Aging

The Minnesota Board on Aging is the designated State Unit on Aging for Minnesota for the purposes of administering the federal Older Americans Act. Its 25 board members are appointed by the Governor and represent diverse backgrounds, ages, interests and communities across the State. The MBA administers more than \$23.1 million in Older Americans Act funds and an additional \$6.8 million in state funds annually. We work closely with our seven regional Area Agencies on Aging who leverage an additional \$16.7 million in local dollars and resources, ensure local input and accountability for service funding and promote local innovation in problem-solving.

The **mission** of the Minnesota Board on Aging is to ensure that older Minnesotans and their families are effectively served by state and local policies and programs -- in order to age well and live well. We make this mission a reality through our three main roles:

- As an “**advocate**” we promote policies to the State Legislature, the Governor and State Agencies that fairly reflect the needs and interests of older Minnesotans.
- As an “**advisor**” we provide objective information and promote public education on ways to meet the changing needs of Minnesota’s older population to age well and live well. We have been a strong partner with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to implement ***Transform 2010***, to prepare Minnesota for the coming age wave of baby boomers and a permanent shift in the age of our state’s population. We are working towards a vision for Minnesota in which our policies, infrastructures and services are transformed so that we can survive and even thrive as this permanent age shift occurs.
- As an “**administrator**” we, partnering with Area Agencies on Aging and others, administer and oversee the effective use of Older Americans Act and state funds to support older Minnesotans. Last year, we provided a total of **325,000** older Minnesotans and their family caregivers with in-home, community and caregiver supports designed to help them maintain their community living and stay out of the more costly Medicaid program.

We manage the Senior LinkAge Line® which provides thousands of older adults and family caregivers with the information and education necessary to make informed decisions about their health insurance and long-term care options. We also administer the Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care. I am very glad that you will be hearing directly from our State Ombudsman for Long-Term Care today, Deb Holtz.

Older Americans Act

The Older Americans Act is the original home and community-based services act. Before Medicaid Waivers there was the Older Americans Act. The Act laid the groundwork for our state’s system of services for older adults and family caregivers. We continue to work towards its vision of “a comprehensive array of community-based long-term care services adequate to appropriately sustain older people in their communities and in their homes, including support to family members and other persons providing voluntary care to older individuals.” This vision cannot be fully realized without relationship building with other service providers and funding organizations to weave a fabric of support for older adults in all circumstances to age well and live well.

We greatly appreciate the leadership of Assistant Secretary Greenlee and the support of the Administration on Aging in helping us – and all state aging networks – to innovate and develop new models to better serve a rapidly growing and changing aging population.

Minnesota Accomplishments

The Older Americans Act has provided Minnesota with significant opportunities to improve our services to older Minnesotans. We are proud of our successes in several critical home and community-based service areas. I want to specifically highlight the great work of our Area Agencies on Aging who effectively ensure that the day-to-day needs of older adults and family caregivers are met while they spearhead dramatic innovations in supportive services to older adults.

- Last year, we provided a total of 325,000 older Minnesotans and their family caregivers with in-home, community and caregiver supports designed to, over time, help them maintain their community living and stay out of the more costly Medicaid program.
- Over 70,000 older Minnesotans and family caregivers received **information and assistance** regarding Medicare, health insurance and long-term care through our toll-free Senior LinkAge Line®. We are extending the reach of our decision-making support through the development of web-based tools including www.minnesotahelp.info. We are expanding our capacity to provide one-on-one long-term care options counseling to older adults. A specific, targeted effort is underway to help individuals **Return to the Community** from the nursing home. These services, together called the MinnesotaHelp Network, are federally defined as **Minnesota's Aging and Disability Resource Center**.
- We are increasingly **targeting** our services to older adults at risk of nursing home placement with incomes above Medicaid eligibility but less than 200% of poverty. We are providing them with flexible service options and support to better manage their risks in order to take control of their health and their lives. We are proud of our new partnership with the Veterans Administration to provide **Veterans Directed Services** to veterans of any age who wish to have more control over the services they receive in their own home.
- Minnesota's Aging Network is taking a lead role disseminating proven interventions addressing falls prevention, chronic disease self-management and memory care. Approximately 1,000 older Minnesotans at risk for falls and struggling to manage multiple chronic conditions are learning how to take more control of their health

through low-cost **evidence-based prevention and self-management programs**. A total of 100 family caregivers of persons with memory loss have improved their ability to manage their caregiving role and maintain their own health through an evidence-based **memory care** intervention.

- The MBA and the Area Agencies on Aging are supporting local efforts to make Minnesota's communities good places to grow up and grow old. Over 45 organizations and 675 community members participated in a recent effort to share proven strategies to promote **Communities for a Lifetime**. This is one example of the important influence of the Area Agencies on Aging **Program Development and Coordination** work in shaping our communities for older adults, family caregivers and all residents.
- In 2009, the **Ombudsman for Long-Term Care** handled more than 2,700 complaints from consumers, family members, friends, social service agency and facility staff related to consumer rights, resident care and quality of life. Over 15,200 visits were made in this process.
- Last year, over 24,000 older adults received **transportation** services to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and to access other critical community services. Without access to these services older adults, especially in our rural communities, would be quite isolated and at risk.

Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act

On behalf of the Minnesota Board on Aging, I submit the following recommendations for changes to strengthen and modernize the Older Americans Act.

Increase simplicity and flexibility in financing...

- Broaden current cost sharing provisions to include services such as homemaker, chore and nutrition. In Minnesota we are increasingly targeting our services to older adults at risk of nursing home placement with incomes above Medicaid eligibility but less than 200% of poverty. Older adults with incomes above 200% of poverty must be given an opportunity to share in the cost of services via sliding fee schedules.
- Simplify the Older Americans Act by consolidating its six separate home and community-based service funding streams under Title 3 into one. This would allow states to offer more flexible, person-centered models of service to older adults whose needs reach beyond any one specific service program.

It is particularly important to consolidate the funding for the Congregate Meals and the Home-Delivered Meals in order to provide us with the flexibility needed to better meet the needs of the older people we serve. We are continuing to see a strong demand for home-delivered meals and a reduced demand for congregate meals.

- Shift the current discretionary funding for the Aging and Disability Resource Centers, evidence-based self-management and caregiver support programs, and the Community Living Program to permanent formula funding. This will generate savings to Medicaid and Medicare at the federal and state levels, while enabling older adults and individuals with disabilities to live well at home.

Strengthen Ombudsman role in the community...

- Expand the program of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to include, as a voluntary option, providing their services to older adults living in their own homes. We have made significant strides in increasing the number of older adults who, despite functional limitations and a need for assistance, can live safe and healthy lives in their own homes. Funding for the Ombudsman Program has not kept pace with this development. It is critical that we have the capacity to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of these older adults in the same way that we are able to for older adults living in nursing homes.

Push for funding to be appropriated for the Elder Justice Act provisions authorized as a part of the Affordable Health Care Act. These funds would improve the capacity of the Ombudsman Program, support program innovations and improve training for Ombudsman staff.

Encourage partnerships to expand community service capacity...

- Strengthen the Older Americans Act to emphasize the critical need for coordination of transportation across federal, state and local funding streams. Minnesota believes in the value of coordinating services, especially transportation services, to stretch resources farther and serve as many people as possible. We seek new opportunities to partner with others to meet this important need.

Strengthen Aging Network role in promoting Communities for a Lifetime...

- Modernize the Older Americans Act by strengthening the role of Area Agencies on Aging in helping communities prepare for an aging population, and acknowledging

the impact of OAA programs on the quality of life of all adults. The Area Agencies on Aging are very involved in local Communities for a Lifetime development work.

Conclusion

Thank you for this opportunity to share the perspective of the Minnesota Board on Aging regarding the benefits of the Older Americans Act to the older citizens of our state. As Chair of the Minnesota Board on Aging, I am proud to be able to share our accomplishments in providing home and community-based services to older adults and their family caregivers. We look forward to working with you on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.