

February 3, 2023

To: Committee on State Government and Elections
Fr: Mary Jo Schifsky, Member of the MN Board on Aging
Re: HF979 , Rep.Klevorn

I'm writing to support HF 979, which would establish a legislative task force to examine the impact of the rapidly-growing aging demographic in Minnesota on the ability and capacity of the State of Minnesota to support healthy, safe and economically sustainable aging in Minnesota.

Planning to meet the future needs of over 1 million Minnesotans aged 65+ is not a priority in MN today. However, the reactionary posture to "help" older adults has been evident for many years. Efforts to support older adults, funneled primarily through "long term services and supports" focus on the oldest and most vulnerable citizens. The majority of efforts to serve older adults are targeted to the needs of those living in facilities, who make up less than 5% of MN's 65+ population. The bulk of the aging population, if not living in poverty or coping with debilitating illness, are not eligible for support or services which could enhance individual ability to remain independent. These services, encompassing the need for transportation, technology, housing, medical support, education and employment, are scattered among several State of MN agencies and only tangentially targeted toward older Minnesotans.

A thorough review of the current state of supports for aging adults in Minnesota is necessary. Minnesota has a reputation for being forward-thinking in relation to caring for all of its citizens. Currently, older adults are a side note. But the swelling population demands focused attention and planning.

The MN Board on Aging (MBA) functions as the State Unit on Aging. It is ensconced within the Department of Human Services. Its three-fold mission: Advocacy, advising and administrating—has been reduced to a single focus. MBA administers Older American Act funding to the most-elderly and most-needy adults, through service providers across the state. There is no capacity for advising or advocating, much less for planning for the rapid growth of the aging adult population. To date, these activities are beyond the capacity of the 25 volunteer members of the Board (and the limited staff made available to the MBA within DHS).

Please support HF 979 to establish a legislative task force to review and prioritize resources to support MN's aging demographic.