

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HEALTH AND HUMAN NEEDS COMMITTEE

By Tom Frazier, November 16, 2016

As you may know, I serve on the Legislative/Advocacy Committee of the Area Agency on Aging of Dane County, and Chair the ADRC Board of Dane County. Prior to my retirement at the end of 2009, I was Director of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups for almost 27 years. I have worked on long-term care issues for all of those 34 years, including the planning and development of Family Care beginning in 1995.

Back then the problem with Medicaid long-term care was that you had to go broke, go into a nursing home in order for Medicaid to pay for long-term care, or go on a waiting list. Three choices: all of them bad. A coalition of aging and disability advocates and the Wisconsin Counties Association demanded that this change and, to make a long story short, the result was Family Care that began with five pilot counties in 2000. After 16 years, this situation remains largely unchanged for older adults in Dane County.

In 2015 only 21% (467) of 2222 people receiving long-term care services in Dane County were frail elders while making up 48% (252) of the total waiting list of 528 persons. The waiting list for the elderly is 13 months long. Another option available in Dane County is the Partnership Program which serves 1,232 people, 35% (431) of them frail elders.

The implementation of Family Care in Dane County will change this for the better for older people. At some point waiting lists will be eliminated, older people in Assisted Living facilities who are not now eligible for the Partnership Program will be eligible for Partnership, Family Care and IRIS after Family Care is fully implemented. In other words, I believe Family Care will be a positive change for older adults in Dane County. The changes will be far more complicated for the Developmentally Disabled population since Dane County has a much more comprehensive and mature system for that population.

To help ensure a smooth transition and high quality services I recommend the following ideas:

- Speed up the elimination of the waiting lists. I see no reason that it should have to take 36 months to eliminate waiting lists, since 528 people is not a huge number. Milwaukee County eliminated a waiting list of 2500 older adults in less than two years. I know this is a state decision but I urge the county to advocate for speeding up the process. Three years is a long time for an older person to wait.
- Maintain county funding for case management for the elderly through the 15 Focal Points. This service will address the needs of senior adults who won't

qualify for Family Care.

- Advocate to continue the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) as a locally operated agency to provide information and assistance and options counseling for older people and people with disabilities and their families. Also, the ADRC governing board has oversight responsibility for long-term care in Dane County.
- Provide funding for LTE positions at the ADRC to assist with the heavier workload during the transition period and to eliminate the waiting list sooner than 36 months. This is especially important to older people on the waiting who are in assisted living facilities and ineligible for the Partnership program until Family Care is fully implemented. Many of these people will run out of money over the next three years and will be forced into a nursing home.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my hopes and concerns with you.