

AAA Committee Recommendation Report

Report to the AAA Board

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Date: 5 August 2019

From: ☐ Access Committee ☒ Legislative/Advocacy Committee ☐ Nutrition/Wellness Committee

History/Related Actions

At the 7/24/19 Legislative/Advocacy Committee meeting, the Wisconsin Poverty Report Summary: 2017 was discussed:

Concern was expressed regarding the increase in poverty rate for older adults in WI by several committee members, in light of the common misconception that older adults are doing well in this regard. Reasons for the increased rate were discussed as well as the need to alert local and state officials to the trend and need to urge a closer look at this issue in order to reduce the trend in the future.

A motion was made by FRAZIER, seconded by SCHMIDLKOFER, to recommend that the AAA Board send a copy of the Wisconsin Poverty Report Summary to elected officials from Dane County along with a letter that highlights the troubling trend of increased poverty among seniors, the causes for the increasing rates, an analysis of which senior programs are currently underfunded, and a request that a public hearing concerning the report be conducted by the State Legislature. The motion carried by the following vote:

<i>Ayes</i>	<i>8</i>	BUNCK, FRAZIER, KAUD, KRETSCHMAN, LEZOTTE, MCHONE, OLSON, SCHMIDLKOFER
<i>Absent</i>	<i>1</i>	DAVIS

Financial/Budget/Other Resource Implications (if any)

None to Dane County

Recommendations

To approve the attached draft letter concerning elderly poverty in Wisconsin.

Attachments/Links

WI Elderly Poverty DRAFT Letter

Wisconsin Poverty Report Summary: 2017

DRAFT Wisconsin Poverty Report Letter

TO: Dane County Delegation

On behalf of the Dane County Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors, we are writing to share a Summary of the 11th Annual Wisconsin Poverty Report [and to alert you to a troubling trend among older adults over the past two years: *poverty rates for older adults are continuing to rise*. As a result, we urge you to dispel the misguided and often harmful thinking that older folks are doing well because the economy is doing well.

The fact is, one in ten older adults in Wisconsin do not have enough income to eat, pay for medical expenses, or afford medications. They are living with “heat or eat” and “prescriptions or rent” decisions being made each day. The increase in poverty faced by our older residents can be attributed to the growing costs of living, out-of-pocket medical costs, increased prescription costs, voluntary 401K contributions in lieu of employer retirement plans, and savings unable to fund increased years of life expectancy with multiple chronic conditions.

At the same time, income earned through the most successful programs to raise older adults out of poverty, Social Security (SSI), and the State supplement to the Federal SSI program for the poorest of older adults, are not keeping pace with growing expenses. In the case of the State supplemented SSI, the small, flat amount allocated per person has not increased in nearly 30 years. Federal and state funding for services such as benefit specialists, group and home delivered meal programs, isolation reducing activities, and services that support healthy aging at home have seen small adjustments or have remained flat. As a result, the funding is actually reduced when factoring in inflation, and frankly, remains grossly inadequate given the exploding growth in the senior population.

The assumed causes of increasing poverty in older adults are not going away and the lack of resources allocated will only drive more of Wisconsin’s elders into poverty over the next several years.

We recommend the state legislature hold a public hearing on the issue of elder poverty to garner more information to help combat this alarming trend. The Area Agency on Aging of Dane County looks forward to working with officials at all levels to thoughtfully consider all solutions for reversing the trend of elderly poverty in Wisconsin.

cc: The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor, State of Wisconsin
State Elected Officials (representing Dane County)
Members, Dane County Board of Supervisors
The Honorable Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive
Ms. Shawn Tessmann, Director, Dane County Department of Human Services