

Maryland Commission on Caregiving

June 06, 2024

10:30 AM -12:00 PM

Virtual Meeting Minute

Commission Member Present: Jennifer Eastman, Trina Townsend, Patricia Morris, Yetunde Olobatuyi, Theresa Robertson, Terri Johnson, Mary Kane-Breschi, Anastasia Edmonston,

Guests: Estelle Brooks, Michael Gray, Teresa Jeter-Cutting, Ruth Kershner

Welcome & Introduction: Theresa Robertson, Commission Chair

Review and approval of May's minutes: Yetunde Olobatuyi

Motion to approve May's meeting Minutes: Yes

Guest Speaker Updates by Senator Benson:

Senator Benson commenced her address by introducing herself as a senator and AARP member, emphasizing her collaborative work with fellow senators and congressmen on Capitol Hill. She highlighted her involvement with a group deeply concerned about the future of social security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Senator Benson urged the commission to schedule a meeting with Senator Chris Van Hollen to facilitate dialogue between senators and federal health insurance stakeholders.

With the upcoming November election, Senator Benson stressed the critical importance of addressing these issues. She expressed concerns about potentially ending the social security payroll tax and advocated for discussions with Senator Van Hollen and his representatives to address this matter. Additionally, she warned about potential funding cuts to social security, Medicare, and Medicaid to balance the budget.

Senator Benson also emphasized her opposition to abolishing the Affordable Care Act, acknowledging the difficulties faced by the previous administration in implementing this legislation.

SB 202: Income Tax/Caregiver's tax credit Updates:

Senator Benson expressed her gratitude to all who gathered in Annapolis to support the passage of Senate Bill 202. This legislation aims to provide tax credits against state income tax for caregivers and establish the Caregiver Expense Grant Program within the Department of Aging. The grant program will enable individuals to deduct expenses incurred while caring for

loved ones. Eligibility criteria include a disability and age 60 and above for the care recipient, and a minimum age of 18 for the caregiver.

Senator Benson urged members to review SB 202 for potential refinements and invited suggestions for additions or amendments. She also announced that the governor has allocated \$5 million for grants up to \$1,500, effective July 1st, to support senior citizens through the state Department of Aging. SB 202 has been signed into law.

The senator appreciated the diligent efforts of all involved and indicated that her office will continue to consider bills impacting senior citizens and disabled individuals. She encouraged prompt attention to any issues affecting seniors, emphasizing the importance of early action.

She offered a Q/A session where she encouraged people to ask questions, and if there are any concerns.

Theresa expressed her appreciation to Senator Benson for her tireless efforts and shared that she had personally attended the bill signing ceremony in Annapolis and had the opportunity to meet with the senator. As the newly appointed commission chair, Theresa acknowledged that this process was new to her and inquired about the funding status of SB 202. Senator Benson reassured her that the bill had been funded, with the governor allocating an initial \$5 million to the state Department of Aging for grant applications.

Senator Benson shared her personal experience as a caregiver for her mother, who lived on a limited income, highlighting the importance of this legislation. Patricia also extended her gratitude to Senator Benson and discussed her foundation's work, noting that caregivers often struggle with financial constraints and respite care. She reported that her foundation had experienced five recent losses, emphasizing the need for respite care to support caregivers.

Yetunde responded by mentioning that the state has a respite program that can address this issue and offered to discuss further with Patricia later. She also noted that Prince George's county, where Patricia resides and her foundation is based, has allocated funding for respite care.

Mary started off by briefly discussing the commission's history that the commission was established in 2001 by the governor's mandate, but unfortunately, without allocated funding. She highlighted the commission's key responsibilities, including coordinating and identifying resources for seniors and caregivers. However, due to the lack of funding, the commission faces significant challenges in achieving its goals.

Mary pointed out that many commission members are state employees with additional job responsibilities in addition to being a member of the commission. She emphasized the urgent need for funding to enable the commission to fulfill its mandate and provide adequate support to caregivers in Maryland. Mary requested Senator Benson's assistance in securing the necessary funding, which would be greatly appreciated to move the commission forward.

Senator Benson expressed surprise at the commission's lack of funding despite being established in 2001 and emphasized the need for a meeting with the governor to address this issue. Mary reiterated the commission's achievements despite limited resources and stressed the importance of full-time staff to enhance its impact. Senator Benson inquired about the commission's relationship with AARP, and Mary explained that while the commission operates independently, it has volunteers from AARP and other organizations, including Easter Seals, NAMI, government agencies, and local community groups.

Senator Benson committed to scheduling a meeting with the governor within a week or two to advocate for funding and invited commission members, including the chair and interested parties, to attend. Mary expressed concerns about state agency representatives' availability but suggested that the chair and co-chair, being non-state agency members, could represent the commission. Senator Benson emphasized the need for a full-time executive director and staff, as well as a resource booklet for the community. Mary mentioned the Department of Aging's request for input on the top three needs of caregivers, which the commission will provide, with funding being a primary requirement.

Longevity Ready Initiative Discussion: Theresa/MaryAnne:

Mary reported that some commission members (Theresa, Kathy, Mary Anne and Patricia) met with Betty Romero from the Department of Aging to identify priorities for caregivers in Maryland. The commission members established three key mandates: soliciting caregiver concerns, developing a model for family caregiver support programs, and coordinating existing support services. Mary emphasized that funding is essential to accomplish these mandates. She also mentioned that having an executive Director and a staff person to assist on a full time basis with the commission will allow the commission to offer and do more for our citizens. Theresa reiterated the importance of funding to enhance the commission's impact. Mary Anne and Jennifer both volunteered to work on a budget and have it readily available for when some of the members do meet with the Senator and the Governor. Theresa promised to follow up with Betty and have the priorities submitted around September and also promised to follow up with Senator Benson about when the meeting with the Governor will hold.

Updates on 2023 Caregiver's Survey:

Jennifer provided updates on the 2023 Caregivers Survey, reporting that they met with the SSW about a week ago (Greg, Shalini and Jennifer) and after filtering out spam and duplicates, they received approximately 2,500 responses. She noted that additional surveys are needed, particularly among the younger population (18 and younger). She mentioned that the SSW would be providing more details sometimes in the fall to the commission members.

Announcements:

Yetunde requested members to submit their work and presentations related to caregivers by the end of June for the governor's report. She also mentioned the recent respite conference in Albany, NY.

Theresa shared the invitation to the National Caregiver Championship Program, a collaborative initiative under President Biden's agenda in the chat. Advised other members to sign up should they become interested in caregiving topics and to learn more about what happens to caregivers in the government.

Larry announced that the Alzheimer's Association applied for a grant for innovative respite services, while Easter Seals applied for funding to support individuals with Alzheimer's and Dementia through weekend respite programs. He also highlighted Easter Seals' existing respite services for children with disabilities at their Silver Spring location, provided by volunteer workers once a month.

Yetunde mentioned that there is no meeting scheduled for July. The commission meeting will resume in August.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 1, 2024, from 10:30am-12 pm.