

March 24,2022

To: Committee on State Government and Elections
Fr: Mary Jo Schifsky, Member of the MN Board on Aging
Re: HF 4036, Rep.Klevorn

I'm writing to support HF 4036 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. Older adults are a side note at this time. But the swelling population demands focused attention and planning.

Theoretically, the MN Board on Aging (MBA) is the State Unit on Aging but, in reality, it is limited to one function: administering Older American Act funding to the most-elderly and most-needy adults. Planning for the rapid growth of the aging adult population is not a priority and is beyond the capacity of the 25 volunteer members of the Board (and the limited staff made available to the MBA).

Please support HF 4036 to establish a legislative task force to examine the necessity for a department on aging for MN.