

**ALASKA COMMISSION ON AGING  
QUARTERLY MEETING**

**December 5, 2023**

**Location**

Virtual Meeting

**Commission Members:**

Bob Sivertsen, Chair  
Paula Pawlowski  
Bob Pawlowski  
Nona Safra  
Janet Engan  
Darlene Supplee  
Pam Samash  
Director Anthony Newman

**Guests:**

Rita Gray, DOL&WD, MASST  
Kelda Barstad, Trust  
Nicole Wery-Tagaban, SDS  
Stephanie Wheeler, LTCO  
Marge Stoneking, AARP  
Kristin Cox, SDS  
Jim McCall, AHFC  
Jessica Spurrier, SDS  
Brenda Shelden, Mat-Su Council on Aging  
Mel  
Larry Johnson, MASST Volunteer  
Inez K. Evan  
Thomas Gardiner

**Staff**

Jon Haghayeghi, Executive Director  
Martin Lange, Program Coordinator II

Minutes Prepared by: Paula DiPaolo, Peninsula Reporting

**Tuesday, December 5, 2023**

**CALL TO ORDER – 9:00 a.m.**

**ROLL CALL**

**WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

Chair Sivertsen welcomed Commissioners and guests to the meeting.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Director Newman announced that Ellen Hackenmueller recently had a baby. Congratulations to Ellen from the Commission.

**ETHICS DISCLOSURES**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

Jan Engan **MOVED** to approve the agenda as presented, **SECONDED** by Paula Pawlowski. Jon Haghayeghi reviewed the contents of the agenda. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**.

**APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

Bob Pawlowski **MOVED** to approve the minutes from the September 2023 meeting, **SECONDED** by Nona Safra. Hearing no objections nor discussion, the motion **PASSED**, and the minutes were approved as presented.

**CHAIR'S REPORT**

Chair Sivertsen reported that the Commission was very busy last year. They look forward to the implementation of the State Plan this next year and measuring the success. They are also looking forward to working with Boards and Commissions to get all the board appointments made.

**VICE-CHAIR REPORT**

Paula Pawlowski reported that today's agenda will cover a lot of the recent activities of the Commission. She looks forward to addressing the inaccessibility of services for seniors across the state.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE**

Budget

Nicole Wery-Tagaban referred Commissioners to the budget in their packet. She explained that the interagency receipts of \$236,700 are the amount of authority the Commission has. The Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipts (MHTAAR) funding is guaranteed funding of \$203,000 in this current fiscal year. Actual amount of funding in interagency receipts is \$214,000 from Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) for Title III services. For FY'24, the remaining balance is \$139,323. MHTAAR funding has a remaining balance of \$173,325 for FY'24.

Jan Engan asked why there was so much money left in the budget halfway through the fiscal year. Nicole stated that the larger expenditures typically come in the spring when

the Commission does the majority of their travel, particularly the trip to Juneau. Nicole also explained that a lot of core services are not defined in this budget, and those include the State's normal charges for IT services, computer services, fees for Commissioner office support to put together and execute the reimbursable services agreements (RSAs), and to assist with Trust transactions. She also noted that the State did a statewide restructure of their accounting system, so they are taking a little longer getting things encumbered this year.

Jon noted that another reason they are seeing low expenditures year to date is because of the open position for a rural outreach coordinator. Nicole stated that as they continue through this fiscal year, they can talk to the Trust about moving that funding as needed.

Director Newman stated that as they reach the three-quarters of the year mark in this fiscal year, SDS can provide a more detailed report on the budget.

Jon Haghayeghi asked if they were about 50 percent spent in their travel budget, and Nicole noted the Commission has spent about \$14,000 of \$30,000.

Jan Engan asked if they have a record of how much the Commission paid out in contract costs for the State Plan. Nicole stated that ACoA received supplemental MHTAAR funding to do the work for the State Plan. That funding paid for surveys, travel, Facebook posts, and paid for the contractor. Nicole can ask to have the 2022 and 2023 amounts pulled and sent to Jon. Jon noted that they have received 100 printed copies of the State Plan, and Marty noted they cost \$15.14 each. They can also print more as needed.

Director Newman noted that there are expenses related to the State Plan, but SDS doesn't get an extra appropriation related to that. He asked what that means for the overall budget. Nicole Wery-Tagaban stated that they have asked the Trust to provide a supplemental budget in the third and fourth years of the State Plan that SDS would be able to use for State Plan development. Jon noted that ACoA received \$60,000, and they spent \$32,000 on Agnew::Beck last year. Nicole stated that they have roughly \$25,000 residual for anything else State Plan related.

Jon Haghayeghi shared the following updates:

#### Housing Teleconference

The teleconference they held was productive, but they didn't get to go as far as they wanted to on the questions that were asked. Jon would like feedback from the Commissioners on what they would like to see more of.

#### Other Updates:

1. Audit Completion – The findings from the recent audit are confidential until they are reviewed by the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee. The preliminary report is expected to be reviewed around December 14th.
2. Travel to Dillingham – Marty Lange is scheduled to travel to Dillingham on December 6th to better understand the recent challenges in the region and meet key players. This trip is aimed at establishing long-term strategic connections.

3. State Plan for Senior Services FFY2024 - FFY2027 – The State Plan is now fully accessible online, and hard copies have been produced. Commissioners and statewide partners will receive copies.
4. Detailed grant information from SDS – Staff are gaining a better understanding of the data available to the Commission housed in databases used by SDS. Marty has attended several meetings led by Kristin Cox, alongside providers, to understand the SAMS database. Commissioners were referred to the State of Alaska SDS Continuum of Care in the packet.
5. Senior Snapshot – Producing an updated Senior Snapshot for the website and distribution during session, which provides a comprehensive look at senior statistics in Alaska. Looking for feedback from Commissioners for data that could be included.
6. Annual Report – A new template for the Annual Report is included in the packet and will be discussed during the meeting. Looking for guidance from the Commission on the format.
7. Podcast – The introduction to the podcast has been recorded. Marty is working to schedule the first interviews alongside Pat Branson.
8. Draft letter to the Governor – Staff are in the process of revising the draft letter to the Governor. This letter will address key issues affecting seniors and outline ACoA's strategies for the upcoming year, including recommendations in accordance with ACoA's statutes. Staff are working to ensure they have documentation of the transmittal to the legislature and the Governor as per the statute.
9. MASST Volunteer – ACoA now has a MASST volunteer in the office, Larry Johnson, enhancing the Commission's capacity and expertise. He has already proven to be a valuable asset.
10. Presentation to Alaska Mental Health Trust – The Commission presented to the Alaska Mental Health Trust on November 15th focusing on the mental health needs of Alaska's aging population.
11. Rural outreach coordinator recruitment expansion – Expanding recruitment efforts for the rural outreach coordinator position to include Anchorage. Aiming to enhance support in rural communities.
12. Advocacy Day handouts – Preparation is underway for the Alaska Commission on Aging Advocacy Day with informational handouts being developed for distribution to legislators. Looking for feedback from Commissioners on the handouts.

Jan Engan referenced the State of Alaska Continuum of Care and asked if the grant services were all NTS grants and funds. Nicole Wery-Tagaban stated that it's more than that. It is all of SDS's community-based grant services. NTS is the largest grant that SDS has, and there are over 30 grantees in this current fiscal year.

### **RURAL OUTREACH SPECIALIST UPDATE**

Marty Lange reported that now that he is in the program coordinator position, he has been working to get the podcast out to fulfill the educational aspect of the Commission's mission statement. He also continues to do rural outreach.

## Rural Outreach

- Enjoyed participating in the grants meeting and hearing the challenges to serving seniors. It was also interesting to learn about the SAMS database. Moving forward, he is planning to dig into SAMS to help give the Commission a better understanding of where the funds are going and what is being done with them.
- Looking forward to meeting with Thomas Gardiner to learn what is going on in Dillingham. Visits have already been set up.
- Rural outreach trips will be made in connection with Kristin Cox so she can provide a briefing to Marty about a particular area before he visits, and she can provide him with specific contacts in the area.
- The rural outreach trips are opportunities to get out to every corner of the state and gather information about 11 observational categories to then report to Commissioners on. Subjects that will be covered include:
  - Social/recreational activities for seniors
  - Mental health support
  - Home care and assisted living facilities
  - Community engagement
  - Access to technology
  - Support for caregivers
  - Cultural considerations
  - Financial assistance
  - Collaboration with local organizations
  - Accessibility/infrastructure
  - Workforce.

Bob Pawlowski noted that decreases in salmon have affected the economy and traditional way of life for seniors in rural Alaska. He believes this should be a key listening point for rural outreach.

Bob Sivertsen asked if staff are informing ACoA's partners of the rural outreach trips. Marty stated that when the rural outreach coordinator's position is filled, he would like to broaden the partner perspective and make that part of the expectation in the pre-trip checklist. Director Newman stated that SDS and the Grants Unit should be continued partners in rural outreach.

Pam Samash noted a lack of communication in Nenana in that people are not aware of the services that are available to them. Marty noted that he takes a stack of the Directory for Older Alaskans with him on every outreach visit he conducts.

## Podcast

Marty Lange stated that he is lining up interviews with Bob and Paula Pawlowski, and Pat Branson will be his co-host. The introduction has been recorded and is ready to go, they have the framework finished, and now they need to do the interviews. He wants to launch once they have four podcasts completed. Once the rural outreach position has been filled, he will have more time to focus on this. He estimates launch will take place between April and June. His goal is to produce one podcast per month after that and they have 40 topics they would like to cover.

Jan Engan noted that May is Older American's Month, and that might be an ideal time to launch the podcast.

Marty Lange stated that the name of the podcast is "Alaska Wisdom and Wellness." There are three ways they are looking for audience engagement: Phone in and tell a story or tell words of wisdom that will be recorded and fit into future episodes, record the story through an online web service, and live interviews. Bob Pawlowski encouraged Marty reach out to the Pioneer Homes as a source of good stories.

Pam Samash cautioned that people might use these call-in opportunities as a place to lodge complaints. Marty noted that all the episodes will be pre-recorded, and there will not be any live call-ins. He stated that if they receive any complaints, they will be able to forward those complaints to the appropriate agencies. He also noted that they won't be able to air all of them, just those that are exceptional. Pam asked about the budget needed to produce this podcast, and Marty stated that it will be about \$650 - \$700 for all of the services they will be using to produce the podcasts. Jon Haghayeghi shared the good fortune ACoA had in that Marty has all of the skills and knowledge to produce these podcasts.

### **2024 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES DISCUSSION**

Jon Haghayeghi stated that staff crafted a message to Alaska's delegation to advocate for continued funding of the Medicare Information Office (MIO). Jon reviewed the letter with Commissioners.

Jan Engan asked if the MIO utilizes volunteers. If so, that is a piece of data that could show how the MIO maximizes its use of federal dollars. Nicole Wery-Tagaban stated that the MIO does use volunteers. Dana Norwood is the MIO manager, and she has started a volunteer program where volunteers are trained to become Medicare counselors, as well as the Medicare Ambassador program, which are people who share knowledge about where people should go to receive counsel. Dana was nationally recognized for the Ambassador program. Jan believes they should include the volunteer information in the letter.

Chair Sivertsen noted that this draft will be amended to correct typographical errors and will include a statement about the volunteers. Hearing no objection, the letter will be finalized and sent.

Jon Haghayeghi opened up a review of the Commission's legislative advocacy topics from the previous session as follows:

#### **Cover letter:**

- Bob Pawlowski suggested adding how long it has been since the Senior Snapshot has been developed/distributed. Once they isolate the time the Senior Snapshot has been in existence, add data to show the growth of the senior population and what that means to Alaska.

#### **2023 Position Papers:**

- 1. Support Governor's budget proposal for an increase of \$1.49 million for senior grant services and Centers for Independent Living.**

- This was a position that was funded during last year's session. Jan Engan suggested adding information to show what was accomplished with the increased funding.
- Darlene Supplee suggested providing information to legislators about what they were able to do with the ARPA funding and what the impact will be without those funds. COVID exacerbated what senior providers knew has been coming for the last 10 years. Meals on Wheels programs will suffer on a statewide level, and things have not and may not go back to a pre-pandemic state.
- Jan Engan believes they need to be prepared once the Governor's budget comes out, and this topic area should be held as a placeholder.
- Work with partner agencies on a joint message.
- Bob Pawlowski suggested capturing stories from Alaskans to build the talking points.

**2. Increase Medicaid Optional Services Medicaid Waiver and Community First Choice Program.**

- Bob Pawlowski noted that Pioneer Homes is Medicaid waiver dependent, and this will be an issue for Pioneer Homes.

**3. Maintain capital funding for Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund.**

- This is a priority that Commissioners feel aligns with their State Plan for Senior Services.
- Reach out to Jim McCall for current information.

**4. Increase Public Assistance programs: Senior Benefits, SNAP, Heating Assistance.**

- Commissioners were in agreement to keep this priority as these programs support seniors living independently.
- Farmers markets.
- State Plan survey responses showed that seniors rely on their PFD as an income source to meet their needs. Financial security.
- Lack of subsistence foods needs to be added to this section.

Jon Haghayeghi stated that this section really seems to speak to the cost of living, and he asked if Commissioners want to create a cost-of-living topic under which they can include multiple issues: fuel, food, housing, et cetera.

Feedback:

- Bob Pawlowski feels the Commission should include the information about the cost of living and maintaining quality of life in the introductory letter.
- Jan Engan supports Bob Pawlowski's suggestion and believes it's either Goal 2 or 3 on the State Plan where it discusses encouraging financial security for older Alaskans. She also noted that if they use the information included in their State Plan, they may be able to define advocacy priorities.

## **5. Increase access to healthcare, particularly Medicare.**

- Darlene Supplee asked for specifics about what they are wanting to increase. She also believes the Commission should only bring forth three or four top priorities. She also recommended shying away from using the word “increase,” and to use verbiage that encourages supporting and maintaining.
- Bob Pawlowski feels this is more of a business issue rather than a legislative issue at the state level.
- Nona Safra stated that based on what she has heard from legislators, if the Commission is going to ask for money, they need to quantify the ask and let legislators know where the funding will come from in the budget. Legislators also want to know if there are any statutory changes needed.
- Chair Sivertsen stated that their job is to inform the legislature of the need through their advocacy. It is not the Commission’s job to pit one program against another; that’s the job of the legislature. The legislators need to determine if the issue is reasonable, worthy, and needs to have funding, and they need to decide where it comes from. The Commission does not have the resources regarding state funding that the legislature has.
- Jan Engan stated that Alaskan healthcare facilities are not readily accepting Medicare clients. Medicaid is reimbursed at a higher rate than Medicare. She wonders how many people were impacted when the Alaska Regional senior clinic closed down. She wonders if this is happening statewide.
- Paula Pawlowski noted that legislators have used the tactic Nona mentioned for years, putting it off on the advocates to figure out how to fund advocacy issues as a way to derail the conversation. She stated that they will look at the Governor’s budget and the pre-filed bills when they come out, track the legislation, and pay attention to committee meetings. She also agreed they need to bring their list down to three or four priorities.
- Chair Sivertsen encouraged the Commissioners to make sure their advocacy is something they can make an impact on. There are other departments and entities that will be working on the Medicare issues.

## **6. Provide support for local transportation programs through capital projects and community grants.**

- Nona Safra believes transportation is a huge issue for seniors in Alaska.

## **7. Direct Service Provider (DSP) shortage.**

- Nona Safra sees this as a significant issue in Alaska, and the Congressional delegation has gotten behind a national bill. The legislature needs to do more than what is currently being done. She suggested this topic as an addition to last year’s priorities.

## **8. Safety in assisted living and independent living.**

- Nona Safra feels that because of the DSP shortage, housing shortage, and employment shortage, safety has become a problem, and she suggested this as an addition to last year’s priorities.



### AARP's 2024 budget priorities – Marge Stoneking:

- SDS community grants – flat funding.
- Access to care: HB 149/SB 130 – Nurse Licensure Compact bill. This would allow out-of-state nurses reciprocity with the 39 other states in the compact and would help to relieve the workforce crisis.
- Retirement readiness bills:
  - SB 88 – Modest pension bill for public employees
  - SB 135 – Alaska Work and Save – Workplace retirement saving option for private employees, a private/public option. This would be available to all business that don't offer a retirement savings plan. The State would oversee it, and it is run similarly to the 529 College Savings Plan.

Marge Stoneking encouraged the Commission to support the retirement saving bills as one of the State Plan goals is to encourage financial security.

Bob Pawlowski stated that the Pioneer Homes supported the Nurse Licensure Compact bill last session, and he believes they will continue to support it this year.

### AgeNet Priorities – Paula Pawlowski:

- Support \$2.7M increase in SDS community-based grants to replace the ARPA funds.
- Supporting a \$1M increase to Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund in the capital budget.
- Support the Department of Health's request for a 1115 waiver to address health-related social needs such as food, transportation, and housing, which affect Alaska's most vulnerable older adults.
- Support \$500,000 in general funding for community transportation.

Based on the information learned from AARP and AgeNet, Chair Sivertsen believes the priorities for the Commission should include SDS grants, supporting workforce development and the Nursing Compact, financial security, and transportation. Paula Pawlowski stated that they need to ensure housing is included in there. Chair Sivertsen asked Jon Haghayeghi to begin to develop position papers based on today's discussion. Jon stated that the discussion has been very helpful in directing him in where the Commission wants to go. He will re-draft a new document, and the Commission can hold an Executive Committee meeting prior to January.

Jim McCall stated that the board approved an increase to the Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund, which will take the fund from \$1.75M to \$3M. He noted that AgeNet's priority is \$1M, but the board has already approved an extra \$1.25M, so the partners need to ensure they are all on the same page. Paula stated that they will ensure they have the correct numbers.

### Legislative Packet Graphic

Jon Haghayeghi directed Commissioners to a draft document in the packet he created that provides a snapshot of the senior demographics and spending in Alaska. He feels the document is very persuasive and gives a sense of urgency. The document

demonstrates the reduced per-person spending while the population has grown considerably. The second page contains statistics received from AARP that demonstrate how essential seniors are to the state's economy. He asked Commissioners if they are interested in using a document like this and if they have any feedback on it.

- Paula Pawlowski expressed her gratitude for Jon and Marty being with the Commission, and she thinks the handout is critical to their mission.
- Jan Engan likes the document and likes the existing title of "Not a senior? You will be eventually."
- Chair Sivertsen feels that this would be a great cover for the legislative folder.
- Darlene Supplee feels the document is colorful and easy to digest. She believes the 85+ demographic needs to have its own graph because they are the crisis population and have the most needs. She suggested maybe two or three sheets of graphs. She also suggested incorporating information about the NTS grant. She also suggested changing the comparison year in the graph from 1995 to 2000 because there have been dramatic changes since then. Jon noted that he will look for reliable sources of information for 2000.
- Bob Pawlowski suggested including the cost of healthcare services in the document. Alaska is at the far end of the national costs of healthcare.

Chair Sivertsen summarized for Jon Haghayeghi that the Commission is in favor of the document, but he also cautioned that the document shouldn't be too wordy to be an effective marketing tool. Jan Engan felt that the headline should stand out a little bit more to make it more eye catching.

### **IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE FOR STATE PLAN**

Jon Haghayeghi directed Commissioners to the State Plan in the packet and noted that many of the goals are not observable yet. He also remarked that they are in the second year of a funding cycle, so the actual funding formula won't be reflected for another year. Jon believes it will be very useful for the Commission to review the goals and objectives at every quarterly meeting.

He reviewed the goals and outcome measures as follows:

### **Goal 1: Promote Healthy Aging and Provide Comprehensive and Integrated Healthcare for Seniors**

#### **Objective 1 Outcome Measures:**

- **Increase in the utilization of SNAP proportionate to the increase in the senior population. (Long-term)**
  - Suggestion: Invite Deb Etheridge from Division of Public Assistance to present on this issue.
  - Suggestion: Reach out to Senator Hughes who is heading up a food security task force.
- **Restore NTS congregate meal provisions to 100% of pre-COVID levels within the next three years. (Intermediate-term)**

- Suggestion: Jon Haghayeghi will work with Kristin Cox to see if there is a way they can track the progress being made.
- Is the motivation behind this outcome measure the social gathering or the food itself?
  - Congregate meals were developed in local communities to bring older adults together around a healthy meal. It reduces social isolation. The reality is there are some people who choose not to engage in congregate opportunities.
  - Congregate meals are a “wellness check” for providers. Home delivered meals are as well, but the frequency may be less.
  - It costs more for providers to bring someone to a congregate meal than it does to send them a meal at home.
  - Every region is different with their needs for congregate versus home-delivered meals.
- **Increase in the amount of food sourced within the state. (Long-term)**
  - Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program: <https://health.alaska.gov/dpa/pages/nutri/fmnp/fmnpseior.aspx>
  - Suggestion: Hydroponics are successful in parts of the state. Might be an opportunity for community gardens.
  - Suggestion: This is not only good nutritionally, it’s also great for senior activities, supports local businesses, and will hopefully provide more food processing facilities in Alaska. The Commission should promote greenhouses in communities. Wish there was a task force on just this issue.
  - Anchorage Senior Center has a raised-bed garden for seniors. It also provides opportunities for socialization. Suggestion: USDA may have information about schools building greenhouses to encourage local growth.
  - Anchor Point Senior Center built greenhouses with the USDA grants, and two were built. The greenhouse is entering its sixth growing season, and they grow to serve food at the senior center, and they have a member’s market. The community has rallied around it.
  - Nenana school uses a classroom as a greenhouse for year-round plants for the community.
- **Endorse partnerships between farms and senior centers to endorse the Farm-to-Senior-Center initiative within the next five years. (Long-term)**

Kelda Barstad stated that she has attended presentations by the Department of Health (DOH) around food as medicine. There is an opportunity for an 1115 Medicaid waiver that treats food as medicine for populations that require special diets. Seniors and people with chronic health conditions are among those populations. This could be a huge boost to food security for seniors, especially those with chronic conditions and would enhance the ability to get nutrition out statewide. DOH is also looking at Alaska Native sustainable food practices, local growing, and greenhouses.

**Objective 2 Outcome Measures:**

- **Partner with Division of Public Health which has existing prevention programs, efforts and messages. (Intermediate-term)**
- **Partner with the Older Persons Action Group which publishes the Senior Voice magazine and which can facilitate statewide communication and program promotion. (Continued)**
  - Staff have been working with David Washburn as they have been updating the Directory for Older Alaskans. He will also be a partner as they get the podcast off the ground.
- **Advocate for additional funding for the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention grant program. (Long-term)**
- **Advocate for improved connectivity in rural Alaska so seniors around the state can participate in virtual physical education or fitness programs. (Long-term)**
  - Marty has been working very closely with the Digital Equity Initiative.
- **Increase the number of seniors who receive screenings and vaccinations each year. (Long-term)**
  - This activity may involve the distribution of information allowing seniors to be more aware of offerings that may be around them for preventative care.
- **Increase in healthcare providers offering preventative health services to seniors. (Long-term)**
- **Increase in healthcare clinics or community organizations offering senior health clinics or health fairs and increasing the number of public service announcements surrounding preventative healthcare measures. (Short-term)**
  - This objective involves public service announcements.

### **Objective 3 Outcome Measures:**

- **Increase the number of seniors with behavioral health needs who report improvement in key life domains; use Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data or ACoA senior survey(s). (Long-term)**
  - Do they want to include some findings from surveys in the Senior Snapshot? This is one of the outcomes that will be observable through a survey.
  - The Commission needs to determine the cadence with which they will gather information through surveys.
    - Suggestion: Maybe reference the State Plan on Aging guidance because some of the outcomes are requirements to implement. Perhaps partner with SDS scope of work/reporting process.
    - Suggestion: Mat-Su Health Foundation did a survey about connecting the community, but it also had to do behavioral health issues. They have funding for additional data gathering.
    - Suggestion: Senior information portal on ACoA's webpage.
    - Suggestion: Maybe follow up with Division of Public Health to get a baseline on the number of Alaskans who are depressed.
- **Increase mean number of days Alaska adults 65 and older report being mentally healthy over the past 30 days; use BRFSS data or ACoA senior survey(s). (Long-term)**

- **Work with medical providers and elected officials to increase rates for Alaska Medicare recipients. (Intermediate-term)**

**Objective 4 Outcome Measures:** (The letter advocating for continued funding for the Medicare Information Office is a measurable outcome of this objective.)

- **Increase the number of Medicare beneficiaries that review their Medicare Part D plan each year so that their plan works for them. (Short-term)**
  - What is the best source of data for baselining and measuring this objective? Jon Haghayeghi will look into this.
  - Suggestion: Note that the data will not be 100 percent of all of the people that are eligible for Medicare within the state, but maybe work with the Medicare Information Office to see if they have statewide data on that.
- **Engage in dialog with elected officials regarding affordability of senior medical services and commodities. (Intermediate-term)**
  - Creating visual aids for legislative advocacy packets.

**Objective 5 Outcome Measures:**

- **To incorporate provider survey questions regarding emergency preparedness plans. (Intermediate-term)**
  - Suggestion: During the pandemic, the State issued a COVID protocol manual on reopening and best practices. It was geared toward the broader senior providers.
  - In the State Plan narrative, SDS handled the response on disaster preparedness.
  - After the pandemic began to wind down, the Alaska Association of Developmental Disabilities (AADD) got together with SDS leadership and expressed a desire to work with SDS to be better prepared for the next disaster. Director Newman will follow up with the AADD executive director to determine where they are in that work.
- **Support the providers in developing emergency/disaster response plans. (Long-term)**
- **Increase in the number of trainings statewide that assist seniors in preparing for disaster. (Long-term)**
  - Suggestion: Department of Military and Veteran Affairs coordinates all of the emergency response plans for the state. The U.S. Public Health Service does have a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) office in Alaska.

**Objective 6 Outcome Measures:**

- **Percentage increase in the number of healthcare providers specializing in geriatric care. (Long-term)**
- **Number of organizations offering staff training or education for geriatric care. (Intermediate-term)**
- **Develop intergenerational programming, including volunteer programs to expose youth to their elders and encourage geriatric studies. (Intermediate-term)**
  - Suggestion: Look for educational partners: AVTEC, University of Alaska.
  - Suggestion: Public Health program on Alzheimer's and dementia, and focus on the educational component out to providers.

- Maple Springs in the Valley offers training programs for getting aids into their facilities.

**Objective 7 Outcome Measures:**

- **Increase in the number of seniors engaging in fitness and nutrition programs annually. (Intermediate-term)**
  - Suggestion: Kristin Cox may know this information if the State is collecting the data.
  - Suggestion: Anchorage Senior Center is funded primarily by the Municipality of Anchorage, and they provide quarterly reports to the Municipality. Fitness is included in the quarterly reports. They also have an electronic sign-in screen at the senior center.
- **Encourage educational programs on healthy lifestyle practices to be tracked via tools like the BRFSS or dedicated senior survey(s). (Short-term)**
- **Number of wellness classes offered at senior centers or community centers. (Intermediate-term)**
- **Advocate for additional funding for the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention grant program. (Long-term)**
- **Apply for additional ACL prevention funding opportunities. Investigate currently funded innovative projects that might be a good fit for Alaska. (Long-term)**
- **Advocate for improved internet connectivity in rural Alaska so seniors around the state can participate in virtual wellness classes and programs. (Long-term)**

**Objective 8 Outcome Measures:** Marty Lange has been working steadily on this entire initiative.

- **Increase in reported utilization of telehealth use proportional to the growth in senior population. (Intermediate-term)**
  - Reportable through survey – maybe do a survey mid-State Plan cycle.
  - Suggestion: Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development operates a Telehealth Registry that providers have to sign up for if they are going to offer telehealth. This may be a good data source to determine how the use of telehealth is changing in Alaska.
  - Suggestion: Partner with the Senior Voice to provide educational material on specific topics in the State Plan. Create a budget line item for partnering with the Senior Voice to provide outreach and information to seniors.
- **Growth in the geographic broadband footprint across the State of Alaska. (Long-term)**
- **Observe greater use of and comfort using technology among seniors completing the Senior Survey. (Long-Term)**

Jon Haghayeghi stated that in the interest of time, he will review the State Plan goals and objectives with Marty Lange and will send out an update with regard to each of the objectives.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

A public comment period was offered, and a full transcript was prepared.

## **STATUTORY REVISIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Jan Engan stated that this subject was discussed during the last quarterly meeting. She reiterated that the old statutes start with 47, and when DHSS was bifurcated into DOH and Department of Family and Community Services, the statutes were updated, but she is unaware if the Commission was able to have any input into the revisions. Some of the changes are number changes, but others are word changes.

Jan Engan discussed some of the changes as follows:

- There was a change in meetings, and Sections (b) and (c) are new sections. It basically states that the majority of members of the Commission constitutes a quorum for conducting business and exercising the powers of the Commission. The Commission shall elect one of its members as a chairperson and may select other officers as it considers necessary.
- The executive director section had some word changes. They added that the executive director of the Commission shall formulate and submit to the department a comprehensive statewide plan that identifies the concerns and the needs for older Alaskans and the present plan to the Commission. They removed two sections from the old statute 47.45.230, and those two dealt with the administration of the Older Americans Act within the department.
- Under Powers, Duties, and Limitations, they added: The Commission shall approve a comprehensive statewide plan that identifies “and addresses” the concerns and needs of older Alaskans. Sections 7 and 8 used to be Sections 9 and 10. They removed number 7 which said: With approval, the Commission would set policy for the administration of federal programs subject to state control as provided, and it listed the numbers in the Older Americans Act (OAA). Number 8 said: With approval from the Commissioner, the Commission will set policy for the administration of state programs provided under AS 47.65. That is no longer in the new statute, and that talks about distributing the dollars that are appropriated to SDS, both federal and state general funds. To Jan, this relates back to the funding formula. If ACoA is going to be tweaking the funding formula, they need to have some understanding of how these dollars are distributed. It seems that there could be a simpler format to get that information on the 30 to 40 contracts and what dollar amount is being provided through the contracts, which would include OAA dollars and state dollars. She has been unable to receive this information. It would also give the Commission an understanding of the number of services for which they are contracting. But this has been removed from the new statutes.
- At no place in the new statutes is the OAA referenced.
- Under Section (b) of Powers, Duties, and Limitations, number 9, it used to say “set standards,” and now it’s “recommend standards.” This reflects the partnership between SDS and ACoA in the development of the State Plan when they were talking about goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes. To Jan, some of those things need service standards if they are not already out there. They need to go back to the State Plan on Aging guidance to see what the feds

are requiring for some of the dollars they have. She feels SDS and ACoA need to work together on recommendations because it is in the State Plan goals.

- In the old standards, there were 10 subheadings under (b), and number 10 was taken out. Number 10 read: Adapt regulations necessary for the administration of the old statute. She feels this change can be read two ways, the administration of the OAA dollars or the administration of the Commission on Aging, and she is unsure which is which.

During a technical issue, Director Newman questioned the changes that Jan was referencing as to whether or not the Commission was suggesting these changes to statute. Paula Pawlowski stated that the Commission asked Jan to do this exercise to find out where all the changes had been made to then compare it to the Commission's bylaws to see if they needed to revise their bylaws to be in compliance.

Jan Engan summarized her presentation by stating that she believes it's important to get some mention of the OAA in the statute, because the OAA is very specific to the dollars that are coming in that the funding formula is created for. Chair Sivertsen agreed that the OAA should probably be added to the statute so the funding source is identified.

Director Newman understood Jan to be saying she has repeatedly been requesting information from SDS that she hasn't received. Jan agreed and stated that she would like to see the contracts to the providers. NTS is lumped into one big category, and they are unable to discern what specific services are being provided by each provider. When it is all lumped together, it's hard to figure out what kind of services are being provided and where the holes are. Director Newman will follow up with the Grants Unit.

Bob Pawlowski likes the way AS 47.45.240 has been re-written to AS 44.29.790 because (2) under Powers, Duties, and Limitations, it is very clear that it was kept broad that the Commission can make recommendations directly to the Governor and the legislature on appropriations for programs, not just the OAA. He thinks that is a very important distinction. If they put the OAA back in, it may restrict the Commission to just the OAA.

Jan Engan stated that she was also looking in Chapter 65, which is service programs for older Alaskans and other adults, and under Article 3, she came across general provisions, which are the definitions. It has a definition of an older Alaskan means a resident of Alaska who is 60 years of age and older. The federal OAA dollars are available to anybody that is 60 years of age and older no matter where they live. So if an Alaskan has a friend visiting from outside of Alaska, they would be eligible to utilize services under Title III. She noted that there is a state match, but she believes the state funds would have to live under the federal definition of an eligible adult for services under the OAA. Individual programs that are strictly state funded may be different.

Jon Haghayeghi asked if there was anything that needed to be addressed that he should add to his to-do list. Jan liked Bob's suggestion that perhaps the OAA does not need to be referenced. She also is unsure if she wants to open up the definition of older Alaskans unless it comes up at some point in time.



Bob Pawlowski asked Jon to review the State Plan to see what has federal appropriations that affect older Americans and make a list.

Chair Sivertsen thanked Jan Engan for her work on reviewing the statutes to ensure the Commissions bylaws are in alignment. At this point, he doesn't see any discrepancies between the statute and the bylaws. Jan noted that down the line they will see some major revisions in the OAA as well.

### Letter to the Commissioner of the Department of Labor & Workforce Development (DOL&WD)

Jon Haghayeghi directed Commissioners to the draft letter to the Commissioner regarding the proposal to add seats to the Commission.

Rita Gray stated that the DOL&WD would like to be involved with those entities that develop State Plans to ensure that the workforce development aspect is represented and to open lines of communication between departments. DOL&WD noticed, when they looked at their State Plans with DOH, that they both have the same shortfalls, such as labor shortages. They also want everyone to be aware that it is a priority for the DOL&WD to grow an Alaskan workforce, and this includes the MASST program. DOL&WD wants to ensure they are in line with ACoA's objectives and try to head toward the same goals.

Jon Haghayeghi believes this is a non-controversial issue. He suggested they add one more additional seat so they can reach a quorum.

Chair Sivertsen believes it is a positive move to add expertise to the board so they can increase the sharing of information that will benefit the state as a whole. Jon will work with Rita Gray to develop draft language to submit to the Commissioners, and they can review this in Executive Committee.

Paula Pawlowski reviewed the roster and noted they have representation from the Pioneer Homes; Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; and Department of Health that are appointed members. That leaves six public members, although there is one senior service provider. She wants to ensure they have more public members than designated State seats. She also noted that they are two members down. She is in favor of adding the seats.

Director Newman stated that the administration solicits administrative proposals in the summertime, so the window has closed for this legislative session. If they have an emergency need, they can always introduce it as such, and the Commission also has the ability to approach individual legislators to take up the cause. He believes it's good form to start with the administration. If the Commission is in favor of this, he would be willing to help with that conversation as it proceeds. Chair Sivertsen believes they would prefer to follow the process and can prepare for a summer introduction.

### **RECOMMENDATION TO GOVERNOR AND THE LEGISLATURE**

Jon Haghayeghi directed Commissioners to the draft letter presenting the key issues and targeted recommendations from the State Plan. It is in the Commission's statutory

responsibilities to present this information to the Governor and the legislature. Jon read the letter aloud to attendees.

Bob Pawlowski recommended removing the word “elderly” and replace it with “seniors.” He also thinks they should add verbiage about senior citizens enjoying a quality of life in the community they live in.

Jan Engan referenced the Conclusion and Call to Action section, “funding the resource allocation tool project is critical,” and she asked what the resource allocation tool project is. Director Newman stated that this project is a result of a request by advocates in the developmental disabilities sector. This project has been funded but needs continued support. Director Newman suggested adding “Senior and Disabilities Services’ resource allocation tool project.”

Pam Samash referenced the food security section of the letter. She reminded Commissioners that they were just talking about greenhouses, and she feels they could add more to that section, particularly because the Governor has been focused on food security right now. In the subsistence section, they could add more about the decline of salmon stocks in the state. She noted that wildlife management in the Interior has been mismanaged, and subsistence is a serious problem. She also believes the workforce shortage should also be addressed in the letter by way of asking the Governor to establish a task force to look at education and keeping young families in the state.

Chair Sivertsen stated that food security is broad and a regionally specific issue that would be too lengthy to get into detail in this letter. The letter concludes with ACoA looking forward to assisting the Governor through this process. The Commission can make recommendations as it pertains to seniors when the Governor requests information. The same holds true for outmigration.

Bob Pawlowski believes they should put additional information in the poverty and aging section that relates to people being dependent on subsistence and those who are depleting their resources for care.

Jon Haghayeghi asked if the contents and main points of the letter have continuity with the advocacy priorities the legislators will receive. He asked if a letter like this also needs to go to the legislature. Chair Sivertsen stated that this letter satisfies the audit’s requirement to send something to the Governor. The letter to the legislature may be in a different context than what they send to the Governor because the legislature makes appropriations.

Pam Samash doesn’t understand why she hasn’t received support from the Commission about her suggestion of asking the Governor to form a task force. She noted that she has heard there are over 300 jobs the State can’t fill in Juneau, and that’s just one small area. She thinks they are in a state of emergency because everyone’s kids are moving away. Chair Sivertsen agrees that it is an issue, but it is outside of the mission of the Commission on Aging. This is a larger issue in the state, and there are other agencies that are advocating for that and are tracking outmigration and people leaving villages looking for opportunities. Pam believes seniors are affected

because they live for their grandchildren, and when their grandchildren leave, part of the senior leaves with them. She believes it is a senior issue.

Director Newman noted that he is cautious about participating in the advocacy portion of this meeting, but to address Pam's comments, an aftereffect of COVID is that the workforce has disappeared. One of the concerns is not only potential program cuts and caregiver burnout, but the availability of workforce and sustainability of service levels. Jan Engan noted that workforce shortages is already contained in the letter, and this touches on Pam's concerns. She further noted that this letter is opening the door for conversation with the Governor. Chair Sivertsen remarked that it's not just outmigration. People are moving around the state, and people are also moving into the state.

Bob Pawlowski stated that he saw a recent article about a conference with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board. He believes that's the strongest group to address what is going on in the workforce. Darlene Supplee also noted there is a massive retirement happening, and there is no populace behind it. She also believes there are more skilled entities in the state to address the workforce issues. Jon Haghayeghi added that the population of people over 60 exceeds the population under 20 in Juneau.

Before he sends it out, Jon Haghayeghi will circulate the document to Commissioners once edited.

### **SENIOR SNAPSHOT AND ANNUAL REPORT UPDATES**

Jon Haghayeghi directed Commissioners to the Timeline and Potential Enhancements to the Senior Snapshot. After review of the document, he reviewed the data that ACoA collects and presents in the Snapshot. He noted that the data is very complementary to the information they hand out and will most likely be appended to the back of the annual report. He asked for feedback from Commissioners on the following topics:

- Comparative analysis with other states and national averages: Chair Sivertsen feels comparative analysis will need to be selective based on the economies. Comparisons can cut both ways if not done appropriately. Bob Pawlowski agrees and feels they need to stop at the simplest comparisons such as Alaska having the fastest growing aging population.
- Data visualization with charts and graphs: Nona Safra has received feedback over the years to have less text and have more graphs and charts. Chair Sivertsen agreed because the visual information is more understandable. Bob Pawlowski believes they should include a link to the data next to the chart. Darlene Supplee agreed.
- Survey data inclusion: Chair Sivertsen noted that this is data they collect, and this is probably an appropriate place to put it. He also felt that a mid-cycle survey is appropriate. Paula Pawlowski feels that it would be appropriate to put this data into their annual report versus the Senior Snapshot. Chair Sivertsen agreed that the annual report contains more detail about what happened in a particular year. Darlene Supplee noted that providers are required to do a yearly survey. She

believes they can connect with Kristin Cox about the survey questions. She thinks that doing the overall broad survey every two years would be appropriate. Bob Pawlowski feels they shouldn't do any surveys until after the election. He also agrees with putting the information in the annual report from the perspective of what they are seeing, and the Senior Snapshot will back that up. He suggested having the annual report completed by the end of October to allow the legislators time to read it before they go into session. Jon asked if the annual report was on a fiscal year instead of a calendar year. Bob recommended doing it on a fiscal year with its delivery in October. Darlene Supplee further recommended having the ability to drill down in data by region.

Jon Haghayeghi then reviewed the Senior Snapshot data with Commissioners.

- Jan Engan noted that the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRDs) figures are estimates and wanted to know if anyone was collecting actual numbers. Jon believes they can get better figures for this year. Nona Safra recommended checking with Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska. She also noted that there are also studies available on brain injuries and people with Alzheimer's from the Brain Injury Council of Alaska (BICA). She stated that funding is coming to the state related to brain injury, which is an issue that impacts seniors and impacts ADRD. Jan Engan noted that the State Plan guidance included traumatic brain injury as a focus. Jan also suggested falls prevention data be included. Darlene added that there is an article that says that Alaska leads the country in falls that gives the actual cost that she will forward to the Commission. She also commented that the BOLD funding relates to ADRD. It's a new award to the state, so it would benefit them to get involved early. Bob Pawlowski asked for data on how many disabled seniors there are and whether or not data is collected for that. ACoA should acknowledge that there are a significant proportion of seniors that have disabilities.
- Chair Sivertsen asked if they needed to have the COVID-19 case and death counts in the Snapshot. He believes they are past this particular point.

### Annual Report

Jon Haghayeghi reviewed the draft PowerPoint slides of the topic areas. He stated that the intent is to use this as both a presentation and a handout. His plan is to follow the old structure but put it in a format that would be easier to work with. The topics are as follows:

1. Mission
2. Active Commissioners
3. Advocacy Activities
4. State Plan for Senior Services
5. Legislative Audit
6. Teleconferences
7. Department Split
8. Statewide Demographics

Chair Sivertsen asked if they could pick an outreach activity to highlight with pictures to show that they are doing outreach. Jon suggested they can split the advocacy section into different categories of listening sessions, rural outreach, teleconferences, et cetera. Paula Pawlowski stated that they can list their partners under advocacy. She noted that the State Plan for Senior Services slide is pertinent this year, but next year it might be implementation pieces they have discovered over the year. Bob Pawlowski suggested getting rid of the department split topic. He also suggested having a last slide with the topic of "Looking Forward." He also believes that they need to recognize the different laws and appropriation sources, possibly under the Mission topic. Jan Engan suggested listing the Alaska state statutes by reference as well.

Chair Sivertsen asked the Commissioners to provide feedback on any data they may be missing. Jan asked if the Commission has ever testified on behalf of senior services. Chair Sivertsen stated that they have. Bob Pawlowski suggested they go to tenured legislative staffers to see if they have any data needs.

Chair Sivertsen thanked Jon Haghayeghi and Marty Lange for the information they presented. Jon appreciated the feedback from Commissioners on the Senior Snapshot and the annual report.

### **ANNUAL ELECTION OF THE BOARD**

Chair Sivertsen stated that the two seats up for election are the chair and vice-chair. Darlene Supplee stated that the Nominating Committee met, and they unanimously voted to nominate Bob Sivertsen as chair and Paula Pawlowski as vice chair. Bob Sivertsen and Paula Pawlowski accepted the nominations. Hearing no other nominations, the floor was closed for nominations.

Nona Safra **MOVED** for unanimous consent for the slate as presented, **SECONDED** by Jan Engan.

Pam Samash asked for the length of the terms. Chair Sivertsen noted that the Commission holds these elections every year.

Hearing no further discussion, the motion **PASSED** unanimously.

### **NEXT STEPS, MEETING DATES AND TIMES**

Chair Sivertsen stated that the Executive Committee will meet mid January to plan the Juneau meeting and to review and approve any documents. They will also use this time to plan the Commission meetings for 2024.

Bob Pawlowski clarified that the Juneau meeting will be February 20 – 23, 2024. He stated he will attend as much of the meeting as possible, but because of his duties to the Pioneer Homes, he will be attending 11 legislative visits. He stated that the Pioneer Homes advocacy agenda will be finalized by January 10<sup>th</sup>.

Chair Sivertsen stated that priority for legislative visits should be given to legislators who are in committees that affect senior services. They should partner up so two Commissioners are attending legislative visits, and the group of all Commissioners should meet with those higher up in legislative positions and the Executive Branch.

Commissioners should send their list of legislators they would like to visit to ACoA staff. Chair Sivertsen remarked that they should plan to have conversations with partner entities while they are in Juneau.

Paula Pawlowski reminded staff to get on the Governor's calendar now that they have dates set for the Juneau visit. Jon Haghayeghi noted that a flag was flown for Paula Pawlowski and Chair Sivertsen for their service.

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Paula Pawlowski is very pleased with the direction the Commission is going and is glad to spend another year. Jon and Marty are a great team, and it's good to have Larry there to help them out. She is truly overwhelmed with joy, and she is very appreciative.

Nona Safra felt this was a great meeting, and she feels very good going into the next legislative session. She is grateful for the staff they have as well as their small but mighty board. She is grateful to be on the Commission. Advocating has been a calling for her, and she is glad to serve.

Bob Pawlowski reiterated Paula's comments, and he shared that she is excited about the meetings and the direction of the Commission. He is glad to be able to participate.

Jan Engan echoed all the comments. It has been a big change from when she first started on the Commission. She likes to be on a working board to be able to make a difference.

Pam Samash feels honored to be serving with Commissioners. She echoes everything already said.

Darlene Supplee stated that she has attended Commission meetings for 10 years. She has appreciated bringing the provider perspective to the meetings. She is thrilled that Chair Sivertsen and Paula Pawlowski have agreed to continue. She appreciates the momentum of the board to build on what Denise Daniello has done for so many years. It's an honor to serve, and it's been an exciting journey.

Chair Sivertsen thanked the board members for their input and dedication. It has been a lot of work over the last couple of years. He can't say enough about the efforts Jon and Marty put forth bringing the Commission to where they are today. He thanked the Commission's partners and appreciates their involvement in their organizations as well as the Commission's endeavors. He feels they have a bright future ahead of them as they utilize technology and implement the new State Plan. He looks forward to a great year next year, and he believes it will carry on for years to come. They have gained great relationships with their partners SDS and Administration for Community Living. He thinks the Commission is doing more today than they have in many years. Best wishes for the holiday season, and he looks forward to seeing everyone in January.

### **ADJOURN**

Bob Pawlowski **MOVED** to adjourn, **SECONDED** by Darlene Supplee. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

