

MINUTES
New Hampshire State Commission on Aging
Monday, October 19, 2020 10:00 a.m.-noon
Held via Video Teleconference

Present: Rep. Polly Campion, Chair; Ken Berlin, Vice Chair; Roberta Berner, Clerk; Sen. Ruth Ward; Wendi Aultman, DHHS; Deb Scheetz, DHHS; Patrick Herlihy, DOT; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Sunny Mulligan Shea, DOJ; Lynn Lippitt, NH Housing Finance Authority; Richard Lavers, DES; Elizabeth Bielecki, Director of DMV, DOS; Appointed by the Governor: Carol Stamatakis, Kristi St. Laurent, Rev. Susan Nolan, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Susan Ruka, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Harry Viens, Kathy Baldrige, Susan Emerson; Rebecca Sky, Executive Director.

Absent: Rep. James MacKay; Janet Weeks, DOL; John Kennedy.

Guest Presenter: Commissioner Lori Shibinette, NH Department of Health and Human Services

Guests: 24 members of the public (John Wilson, Jon Eriquezzo, Carol Currier, Heather Carroll, Jennifer Rabalais, Joan Marcoux, Arnold Newman, Beth Todgham, Mary Roberge, Kimberly Blakemore, Nancy Rollins, Laura Davie, Heidi Kroll, Paula Minnehan, Marcia Garber, Elaine Paez, Martha McLeod, Kristin Kosteki, Wendy Hawkes, Bev Cotton, Donna Davey, Christina Dyer, Derek Winsor, Marianne Jackson)

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of Minutes

Chair Polly Campion called the meeting to order at 10 a.m., provided an overview of the agenda, welcomed the Commission and guests and read “A Checklist to Ensure Meetings Are Compliant with The Right-to-Know Law During The State Of Emergency.” The State of Emergency has been declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A requirement of such compliance is to take a roll call attendance. When each member answers, he or she also must state whether there is anyone else in the room during the meeting. Clerk Roberta Berner called the roll, also asking that the members of the public and presenters attending the teleconference identify themselves. The following attendees noted that a family member might pass through the room during the meeting, since they were attending from home: Commission members Susan Buxton, Patrick Herlihy, and Susan Denopoulos Abrami. Commission members Harry Viens and Susan Ruka were attending from other settings and said that others might come through the area.

Minutes from the September meeting were sent out to Commission members with the agenda for review prior to the October meeting.

Lynn Lippitt made a motion, seconded by Patrick Herlihy, to approve the September minutes. By roll call vote, the following members approved the motion: Chair Campion, Ken Berlin, Roberta Berner, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Richard Lavers, Carol Stamatakis, Elizabeth Bielecki, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Daniel Marcek, Rev. Susan Nolan, Harry Viens, Susan Emerson, Suzanne Demers and Susan Ruka. Sen. Ruth Ward and Kathy Baldrige abstained from the vote. The motion to approve the September minutes was approved by 18 members.

II. Update on Task Forces

Interim Task Force Chairs provided brief updates.

A. Aging in Community of Choice – Lynn Lippitt

The Task Force met in early October to outline steps toward goals and to determine information to be gathered in order to identify gaps in services. The Task Force will be revisiting the State Plan on Aging to build off of relevant findings and recommendations. The group will meet again on November 9.

B. Age-Friendly State — Sunny Mulligan Shea

The Task Force is learning how the age-friendly model is working in communities in the region by inviting speakers to talk about specific projects. At the last Task Force meeting, presenters included Todd Fahey, from AARP-NH, and a leader from the Seacoast Village Project. The October meeting will feature speakers from the Southern NH Planning Commission and the Alliance for Healthy Aging.

The Seacoast Village Project is a membership organization (\$250 for an individual, \$300 for a couple; scholarships available). It provides socialization, transportation, chore assistance, and other services. Funding has been a challenge (cost of insurance, background checks), as has keeping up momentum during the pandemic.

Mr. Fahey told the group that an age-friendly community initiative can focus on one or two areas. The concept is not “all or nothing.” He said that he had observed a duplication of services in some areas, with not enough resources to cover the costs.

In response to the first two updates, Chair Campion noted that there is a need for interaction between these two Task Forces to avoid overlap of focus. She said it would be helpful to see how the concepts of aging in community of choice and creating an age-friendly state apply to NH’s state agencies.

C. COVID-19 Emerging Needs – Susan Buxton

As the Task Force focuses on the issue of social isolation, both in the community and long-term care settings, it is looking at ways to improve internet access for older adults in NH.

The Commission-adopted issue brief on social isolation in long-term care during COVID-19 continues to be shared widely, offering additional opportunities for learning and advocacy. The National Association of State Long-Term Care Ombudsmen has shared the issue brief with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, resulting in increased opportunities for visitation in long-term care settings.

D. Operational Infrastructure – Ken Berlin

Ken noted that a great deal of the Task Force’s current work is reflected in today’s meeting agenda (recommended legislation, membership changes, review and approval of Annual Report 2020). He commended Executive Director Rebecca Sky on her great job with the Annual Report. Upcoming Task Force work will include developing a process for on-boarding new Commission members, reviewing term lengths, and considering number of meetings per year.

III. Follow-up to Last Month's Transportation Presentation

A series of questions and answers to follow up on the September transportation presentation was included in the package for this month's Board meeting. Chair Campion noted that the State Coordinating Council for Community Transportation (SCC) has been making real strides to improve transportation coordination in the state and that the Commission's role would appropriately be to amplify and share its work and recommendations.

Dan Marcek said that it is important to take information from national initiatives and studies and translate how they relate to New Hampshire's needs, specifically those of older adults. Patrick Herlihy responded that having adequate data has always been an issue in the state. The SCC does collect data, but last month's presentation to the Commission did not include NH-Department of Health and Human Services' transportation data, which would be essential for complete information. A major issue is that data are gathered differently by different departments, with varying interpretations and definitions.

Dan asked if Patrick and the SCC have seen a hesitancy for providers to cooperate. Patrick responded that providers are collaborating, but not as much coordinating (ensuring more people are on fewer vehicles).

Kristi St. Laurent said that accurate data could be difficult to gather. She said, for example, that many older adults retain their driver's license as a photo identification, but may not drive much or at all. If older adults do not drive under adverse conditions, lack of transportation will have an impact on their lives.

Chair Campion said that she has asked Patrick to keep us in the loop, and added that addressing the need for accessible transportation is in the work-plan for the Aging in Community of Choice Task Force.

IV. Commission Business

A. Recommendation for Legislative Adjustment to Commission Statute

A draft amendment to 19-P:1 was included on the agenda for the October 19 Commission meeting. Chair Campion explained that the language for the draft amendment is identical to that within the statute that created the Office of Child Advocate. The draft amendment reads:

Add: "VI. The Commission on Aging shall be an independent agency, administratively attached to the department of administrative services pursuant to RSA 21-G:10."

Sen. Ward made a motion that the Commission seek legislative sponsors to put forward and amendment to RSA 19-P:1 as worded in the draft. Suzanne Demers seconded the motion. In discussion, it was clarified that DAS Commissioner Arlinghaus had previously suggested such an arrangement.

In roll-call vote, the following members voted in favor of the motion: Rep. Polly Campion, Ken Berlin, Roberta Berner, Sen. Ruth Ward, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Richard Lavers,

Elizabeth Bielecki, Carol Stamatakis, Kristi St. Laurent, Rev. Susan Nolan, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Susan Ruka, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Harry Viens, Kathy Baldrige, and Susan Emerson (21 voted in favor of the motion; 0 voted against).

B. Address Membership Changes

Pam Jolivette and Mark Frank, two of 15 gubernatorial appointees to the Commission, have resigned their positions. In addition to the gubernatorial appointees, the New Hampshire House of Representatives and Senate each appoint a member, and additional members represent state departments.

As the primary sponsor of the legislation that created the Commission, Rep. Polly Campion has served on the Commission as appointed by the Speaker of the House and as chair since inception (September 2019). However, she is not running for reelection to the Legislature and would need to be appointed by the Governor to continue to serve on the Commission as a public member. Public members have been appointed because of their experience in aging services and to represent a broad geographic cross-section of the state.

The Operational Infrastructure Task Force is suggesting that the Commission recommend two individuals to the Governor to fill the two open positions. Polly Campion recused herself from the meeting at this point and signed off of the video teleconference.

Recommended for membership through gubernatorial appointment are Ken Gordon (resume was included in the materials for this meeting) and Polly Campion. The Rev. Susan Nolan made a motion to submit to the Governor a recommendation of Ken Gordon and Polly Campion for Commission membership to fill the two open positions. Suzanne Demers seconded the motion. After brief discussion about the Commission chairmanship, a roll-call vote was taken. The following members voted in unanimous favor of the motion: Ken Berlin, Roberta Berner, Sen. Ruth Ward, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Richard Lavers, Elizabeth Bielecki, Carol Stamatakis, Kristi St. Laurent, Rev. Susan Nolan, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Susan Ruka, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Harry Viens, Kathy Baldrige, and Susan Emerson (20 voted in favor of the motion; 0 voted against, Polly Campion recused herself from the meeting and the vote).

After the vote, Polly Campion rejoined the meeting.

C. Approval of Annual Report

Discussion and approval of the Annual Report were postponed to follow the presentation by Commissioner Shibinette.

V. COVID-19 Impact on Older Adults—NH Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Lori Shibinette

Chair Campion welcomed Commissioner Shibinette to the meeting.

Commissioner Shibinette said that the number of individuals with COVID-19 is on the upswing in the state; however, we are seeing far less of an impact on long-term care facilities than we saw in the spring and summer. Testing in nursing homes is moving from state-facilitated testing to a self-directed program. If a facility has one positive result, then testing reverts back to the state program. Once nursing homes have transitioned to the self-directed program, state testing will be made available for assisted living and other group living facilities.

When a vaccine is available for the coronavirus, the state will partner with pharmacies to administer the vaccine. The plan is to vaccinate all nursing home staff and residents when the vaccine is readily available. The public health network will work with the state to develop regional logistical plans.

Commissioner Shibinette briefly discussed visitation within long-term care facilities. CMS has directed that unless COVID-19 is in the building, visits should be arranged. She said that every facility is engaged in a balancing act, balancing physical health against residents' psycho-social well-being.

Chair Campion thanked the Commissioner for the work that she and the Department are doing and asked about the impact of isolation on older adults who live in the broader community. Commissioner Shibinette said that the Department is hearing about the problems of social isolation for homebound older adults and those isolated from loved ones during the pandemic. She said that the holidays were likely to be difficult this year and suggested that the message is that everyone should be checking on neighbors.

Chair Campion asked the Commissioner about the impact of a difficult economy on health and human services and projections during a budget year (the state budget will be crafted in the first months of 2021 and is a biennial budget running from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023). Commissioner Shibinette said in terms of budget, this had been a "perfect storm" with no additional relief funds, no additional support for extra staffing, and many staff retirements looming. She said that the budget process will give departmental leadership a chance to step back and think strategically about future needs within the health and human services arena.

VI. Commission Business (continued): Discussion and approval of the 2020 Commission Annual Report

Chair Campion started the discussion by saying that it was wonderful to see how much the Commission was able to accomplish even during a pandemic. She praised Rebecca Sky's work since she joined the Commission as Executive Director early in 2020, and specifically lauded her work with the strategic planning process that established Commission priorities, saying it was "nothing short of remarkable."

Rebecca then reviewed the Annual Report, focusing on the overview and specific recommendations. In discussion of the recommendations, Wendi Aultman noted in regard to the recommendation to continue to find ways to increase funding for senior nutrition that the current disaster declaration enables congregate meals funds to go to support home delivered meals and "grab and go" meals offered by senior centers. Deb Scheetz

suggested that in mention of affordable housing it be noted that housing is a significant workforce issue.

Susan Buxton made a motion to approve the 2020 Commission Annual Report with any changes for readability or typo corrections to go to Rebecca for inclusion before submission. Patrick Herlihy seconded the motion. In roll-call vote, the following members voted in favor of the motion: Rep. Polly Champion, Ken Berlin, Roberta Berner, Sen. Ruth Ward, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Richard Lavers, Elizabeth Bielecki, Carol Stamatakis, Kristi St. Laurent, Rev. Susan Nolan, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Susan Ruka, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Kathy Baldrige, and Susan Emerson (20 voted in favor of the motion; 0 voted against).

VII. Public Input

Chair Champion invited input from the public. Kimberly Blakemore from Tufts Health Plan Foundation commended the Annual Report and asked that the Commission use the opportunity of submitting the report to leverage greater publicity and awareness for the issues and recommendations highlighted in the report.

VIII. Adjournment

Chair Champion declared the meeting adjourned at 12:07 p.m. The next meeting of the Commission will take place on Monday, November 16, 2020 from 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom.