

**MINUTES**  
**New Hampshire State Commission on Aging**  
**Monday, January 25, 2021 10:00 a.m.-noon**  
**Held via Video Teleconference**

**Present:** Polly Campion, Chair; Roberta Berner, Clerk; Wendi Aultman and Deborah Scheetz, DHHS; Patrick Herlihy, DOT; Richard Lavers, NHES; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Sunny Mulligan Shea, DOJ; Lynn Lippitt, NH Housing Finance Authority; Kenneth Merrifield and Janet Weeks, DOL; 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, Susan Emerson, Daniel Marcek; Rebecca Sky, Executive Director.

**Absent:** Sen. Ruth Ward, Rep. James MacKay, John Kennedy, Harry Viens, Kathy Baldrige.

**Guest Presenter:** Cheryl Steinberg, Senior Law Project Director, NH Legal Assistance

**Guests:** 22 members of the public (Jon Eriquezzo, Carol Currier, Heather Carroll, Jennifer Rabalais, Joan Marcoux, Arnold Newman, Beth Todgham, Heidi Kroll, Marcia Garber, Elaine Paez, Martha McLeod, Beverly Cotton, Gina Balkus, Anne Diefendorf, Grace Feigl, Amy Moore, Amy Clark, Tereze Stokes, Jackie Dion, Mary Roberge, Ray Burke, John Wilson)

**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.

Before reviewing the November minutes, Chair Campion expressed condolences to Rebecca Sky, whose father recently died, and Ken Berlin, whose mother recently died.

Chair Campion noted that at the end of the meeting there would be a discussion of the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

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

Susan Denopoulos Abrami made a motion, seconded by Patrick Herlihy, to approve the November minutes. By roll call vote, the following members approved the motion: Polly Campion, Roberta Berner, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Richard Lavers, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Janet Weeks, Carol Stamatakis, Elizabeth Bielecki, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Rev. Susan Nolan, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek and Susan Ruka. The motion to approve the November minutes was approved by 16 members.

## **II. Determining COA Vice Chair**

Chair Campion informed the Commission that Vice Chair Ken Berlin has resigned from membership because of personal reasons and competing demands. Berlin was a gubernatorial appointee to the Commission after serving as Chair of the State Committee on Aging. Chair Campion expressed great appreciation for his service, always with a focus on aging in New Hampshire and the needs of older adults.

She then opened the floor for nominations for the position of Vice Chair. Sue Buxton nominated Carol Stamatakis, and Roberta Berner seconded the nomination. Sue Buxton then described Carol Stamatakis' background, which includes many years of advocating for the rights of older adults and those with disabilities, as legal coordinator for Elderly and Adult Services within the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH-DHHS), Executive Director of the NH Council on Developmental Disabilities, and most recently, as Executive Director of Senior Solutions, the Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont. Carol will be retiring from that position within the next few months.

By roll call vote, the following members approved the motion: Polly Campion, Roberta Berner, Wendi Aultman, Patrick Herlihy, Richard Lavers, Susan Buxton, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Janet Weeks, Carol Stamatakis, Elizabeth Bielecki, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Rev. Susan Nolan, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Kristi St. Laurent, and Susan Ruka. The motion to approve the nomination of Carol Stamatakis as Vice Chair of the Commission was approved by 17 members. Carol said that she was looking forward to serving in the role of Vice Chair, and Polly Campion congratulated her and welcomed her to the position.

## **III. Update on State Plan on Aging (*Slides available*)**

Wendi Aultman, Bureau Chief, Elderly and Adult Services (BEAS), NH-DHHS, reported updates, progress, and the impact of COVID on the State Plan on Aging (SPOA), implemented October 1, 2019 and in effect through September 30, 2023. She reviewed goals outlined within the Plan and added that it was not up to BEAS alone to achieve the goals, but also involved the Bureau's partners and collaborators. She added that no one could have predicted that a public health emergency would emerge within the first six months of the Plan's adoption.

Wendi said that it would be good to have a work-group or task force identified to review SPOA priority areas and objectives and strategies of interest to the Commission. She said ideally such a group could spearhead a strategy for recording and reporting progress toward those priorities.

She spoke about the effect of the pandemic on the SPOA. BEAS has been able to be flexible in its approach to service delivery (e.g., "Grab and Go" meals while senior centers and meal sites are closed). Increased funding from BEAS' federal partners has allowed for purchase of personal protective equipment, additional money for Meals on Wheels, remote support for participants in adult day programs, and structural changes to improve the safety within ServiceLink Resource Center office environments. In response to a question, she added that additional changes included plexiglass barriers in office

environments, locked safes and drop-off boxes authorized for provider partners, telehealth and telework options.

Deb Scheetz added that NH-DHHS had increased its emphasis on communication with providers and stabilization of the long-term care workforce.

Polly Campion asked that questions for Wendi and Deb be addressed through the Zoom chat function. She asked that NH-DHHS staff provide an update about the Navigant/Guidehouse report regarding models of care in an upcoming meeting.

**IV. Info. on lawsuit filed against State of NH re: Choices for Independence administration**

Cheryl Steinberg, Senior Law Project Director for New Hampshire Legal Assistance, provided a brief overview of the class action lawsuit filed by NH Legal Assistance, AARP Foundation, Disability Rights Center-NH, and the Manchester office of Nixon Peabody LLP. The lawsuit focuses on Medicaid-eligible long-term care clients who are at risk of being placed in an institutional setting because home and community-based services, although authorized, may not be available. Cheryl suggested that attendees at the Commission meeting review the press release located on the AARP Foundation website for further information.

**V. Anticipated State Budget Review—Part 1**

In introducing this section of the agenda, Chair Campion explained that the state's departments, Governor's office, and Legislature are currently working on the next biennial budget (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2023). She suggested that as a Commission whose role is to advise the Governor's Office and the Legislature it is incumbent upon us to determine how we do so in light of the budgeting process. To jump start this discussion, state agencies represented on the Commission were asked to present on the portion of their budget that specifically impacts older adults.

Richard Lavers from the NH Department of Employment Security (NHES) agreed to be the first departmental representative to pilot the discussion. He began by noting that NHES receives no state general funds and instead is supported through federal grant dollars and quarterly revenues from employers' state unemployment taxes—so NHES revenue typically increases during economic downturns, since it is based on unemployment claim volume. During the pandemic, NHES unemployment claims rose from an average of 4,000 claims per week up to 120,000 claims per week. The total NHES budget is \$39.7 million and the department has 293 full-time equivalent employees.

All NHES services and programs are available to older adults. Richard Lavers decided for this presentation to focus on the Mature Worker Program, funded through a three-year federal grant (\$300,000 per year). (website: <https://www.nhes.nh.gov/services/job-seekers/mature-worker-program/mature-worker-program.htm> )

The program provides one-on-one case management for adults aged 55+ who have incomes at 125% or below the federal poverty line. The program includes training funds (up to \$5,000 to re-train qualified individuals), and also includes a stipend of up to \$4,000

to reimburse employers for wages paid if the individual is retained for a period of time. However, of 237 individuals interested in the program, only 40% were eligible because of the income limitations. Pre-pandemic, NHES partnered with AARP to hold job fairs to recruit potential participants; now, recruitment is provided virtually.

Chair Campion asked about the state's long-term care stabilization program, which provided an hourly wage boost to long-term care workers. Rich Lavers indicated that NHES collaborated with NH-DHHS to administer the program, which involves processing payments and providing weekly certifications. CARES Act funding supported the program. CARES Act funding also supported the development of the COVID-19 Response Recruitment Job Portal. This portal which was originally intended to be specifically for long-term care employment now includes all employment sectors affected by the pandemic.

Additional questions and comments included:

- Asking Richard to translate 125% of the federal poverty rate to annual income. He said that for a single individual, it would be just under \$16,000 and for a couple, approximately \$21,000.
- Asking if there were other incentives to keep older adults on the job.
- Noting that the long-term care incentive program had made a big difference to retention of workers.

In discussing future departmental reviews of their budgets and identification of budget areas intended to address the needs of older adults, several state department representatives spoke of the difficulties and timing of the Commission's request:

- Most departments' budgets do not have funding specifically targeted to older adults. Programs and services are generally for a wider population.
- The timing of the Commission's request may not work for all departments. Would summer of an off-budget year work better from a planning perspective? Would advocacy be most effective after the Governor's budget is presented in February? Timing may differ from department to department.
- Some departments (e.g., DOT) have both operating and capital budgets.

Chair Campion suggested that this discussion continue at the next Operational Infrastructure meeting in order to determine where we go from here regarding the state budget discussion and its timing.

## **VI. Update on Task Forces**

Task Force Chairs provided brief updates.

- A. Aging in Community of Choice—Co-chairs Lynn Lippitt and Kristi St. Laurent  
The December ACC Task Force meeting focused on gathering input from information and referral providers and centered on assets and gaps in services that enable older adults to live in their community of choice. Presenters were Cary Gladstone, 2-1-1, Thom O'Connor, the New Hampshire ServiceLink network, and Doug McNutt, AARP. Task Force notes, available by request, provide a summary of the presentations. The presenters noted that public awareness of some available services, including transportation options, may be limited. Having a sufficiently

robust work-force to meet the need for some services, such as personal care, is a challenge. The discussion compared developmental disability services to those in the Choices for Independence (CFI) program. The consensus was that CFI tends to be medically oriented while developmental disability services are oriented toward a wider range of needs.

The January Task Force meeting featured speakers Lisa Morris from the NH-DHHS Division of Public Health and Caleb Gilbert from the Carroll County Regional Public Health Network. They discussed the State Health Assessment and State Health Improvement Plan (SHA/SHIP) process and Carroll County's Health Improvement Plan, which specifically identifies Healthy Aging as a priority area. The Advisory Council for the SHA/SHIP work includes three State Commission on Aging members, offering the Commission an opportunity to influence the prioritization of aging issues.

Lynn noted that the meetings had been content-heavy and the focus of the February meeting would be to review the content and identify gaps in services.

- B. Age-Friendly State — Co-chairs Sunny Mulligan Shea and Dan Marcek  
The Task Force has held three meetings since the Commission last met. Speakers have included Sylvia von Aulock, Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, and Marianne Jackson from the Mt. Washington Valley initiative, discussing how age-friendly community planning has taken place at the local and regional levels. The Task Force, with a clearer understanding of the term “Age-Friendly,” is now determining whether to focus efforts on promoting the movement to communities across the state and/or working with state agencies to make “age-friendly” improvements. The Task Force also had a speaker from the Hunt Communities’ project, “Stories from the Sages,” filming older adults’ stories. The Task Force is considering how other institutions could embark on similar projects.

The next meeting of the Task Force will focus on recapping what they have learned and thinking through the process going forward.

- C. COVID-19 Emerging Needs—Co-chairs Susan Buxton and Suzanne Demers.  
The Task Force most recently has focused on the isolation of community dwelling older adults during the pandemic, learning about resources across the state that address the issue (Volunteer NH, RSVP, AmeriCorps, Senior Companion, computer training options including Older Adults Computer Training—OATS.org, and cyberseniors.org). The group also has considered geographic discrepancies in services, activities, broadband access.
- D. Operational Infrastructure—Polly Campion – chairing.  
Polly referred members to the two documents developed by the OI Task Force sent with the packet for this meeting—one that details members’ roles and another that addresses the onboarding process. The Task Force would like Commission members’ feedback regarding the documents. She reminded members to complete and return their financial disclosure form to the state.

## **VII. Public Input with a focus on the roll-out of the vaccine registration**

Among the concerns expressed about the “1B” registration process for those aged 65 and over or adults with other medical conditions were the following:

- How will homebound older adults receive their vaccines? What exactly are Regional Public Health Networks doing and how are home health care agencies involved?
- What about older adults with less ready access to information, computers, the ability to stay on hold with 2-1-1?
- How will outreach be managed for those who have barriers to accessing appointment on their own? (Great concern for those 80+ y.o. as they have the greatest risk of mortality.)
- The seeming randomness of scheduling which left some of the most elderly registrants waiting until April for their scheduled vaccine.
- The lack of supply.
- The great variance in call-times/wait-times for 2-1-1.
- Is there coordination of transportation to support those unable to provide their own to vaccination sites.

Deb Scheetz responded that the feedback has been quite consistent and in alignment with the concerns expressed here. She noted that ServiceLink was ready and available to assist clients. If anyone runs into systemic issues, he or she should contact [covidvaccine@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:covidvaccine@dhhs.nh.gov) . She added that additional concerns included vaccine hesitancy, especially in the developmental services community, numerous questions from providers regarding status (1A or 1B) and the ability of their staff to be scheduled for the vaccine. She referred attendees to two websites: [www.vaccinesnh.gov](http://www.vaccinesnh.gov) and <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/resources-guidance/vaccination-planning.htm> .

## **VIII. Adjournment**

Chair Campion declared the meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m. The next meeting of the Commission will take place on Monday, February 22, 2021 from 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom.