

## Elderly Nutrition Program Task Force

### MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, December 19, 2023

10:00 AM Zoom Remote Meeting and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM by Co-Chair, Senator Lesser.

The following task force members were present:

Members: Representative Jillian Gilchrest, Senator Matt Lesser, Maureen McIntyre, Alison Dvorak, Marie Allen, Lena Rodriguez, Eugene Theroux, Michelina Buchino, Joel Sekorski, Erin Estey, Bill Rybczyk

Absent were: Sarah Leathers, Aleck Spinks, Stan Mingione

#### **Remarks by the Chairs:**

Co-Chair Senator Lesser made opening remarks and wished everyone a happy holidays. He wanted to schedule an additional meeting in the event that the group could not come to an agreement or get through everything on the agenda.

Co-Chair Representative Gilchrest also wished everyone a happy holidays and said she was looking forward to the meeting, as well as made a note that the meeting was being broadcast on CT-N.

#### **Review of ADS Recommendations:**

Senator Lesser began the meeting by turning it over to Erin Estey of ADS to walk every one in the group through their responses. Erin specified that the responses are from

both ADS and OPM, and that recommendations come out of the task force. She then gave a presentation on the responses [*and can be found [HERE](#)*].

Senator Lesser asked if there had been any research into the maximization of SNAP, and Erin replied that there had not been at the state-level. Senator Lesser said that that seemed like the "lowest hanging fruit" to be able to obtain more funds for the program. He then asked about streamlining Form V, specifically how to do it "expeditiously" and if there's anything on the form that would need to be changed through legislative means. Erin stated that it was administrative and didn't have to be changed through the legislature. Senator Lesser then asked if there were questions that could be removed and if that would make it an easier process. Erin recommended creating a small working group of users who had completed Form V and asking them for their perspectives, to which Senator Lesser then asked if she could have those conversations and come up with recommendations by the next meeting. Erin stated that she could work on getting people together but couldn't promise to enact changes by that point.

Senator Lesser stated that the LIHEAP program model is still a goal, but wasn't sure of feasibility with OPM, so he asked Erin how to structure that financially. She replied that she wasn't sure about the funding that's available. Senator Lesser then asked about the overall size of the programs that ADS administers, to which Erin replied that it's approximately \$17 million per year (not just for elderly nutrition). Senator Lesser said he would like to see that plan of action get recommended, and then turned the conversation over to the other members of the working group for their input.

Representative Gilchrest remarked on the 80% recommendation, and the feasibility of ADS working with OPM to get those funds. She then asked Erin about data entry into the state database with regards to Form V, to which Erin stated that there is one region where the ENPs do the data entry themselves. Representative Gilchrest asked if there was anyone from that region in the working group to get their perspective on whether or not it was working, and Erin replied that there wasn't. Representative Gilchrest asked what the best way to conduct data entry would be. Bill Rybczyk replied that it would be additional work, and asked if the ENP would be compensated for doing this extra data entry work. Marie Allen then remarked that the ENPs currently do enter the data and still have to complete Form V. She went on to say that the program that is used to enter this data, WellSky, isn't "a very intuitive system" and wanted to see it streamlined. Once the information has been entered, it's up to the AAA to confirm that information. Marie stated that they had applied for a grant from OPM to obtain funds for an interface system in order to try to streamline the process via an intermediary system to get funding to the ENPs, and she said that come January, there would be no money. Representative Gilchrest asked if they would still be collecting data, to which Marie answered that they would be. Representative Gilchrest then asked Marie about what she thought about the 50% number, and Marie answered that she thinks it's helpful, but that she may still be late on payments due to the delay caused by the federal budget.

Senator Lesser asked if there were any follow-up questions on the ADS responses, to which Bill Rybczyk said that the 50% number would be a good step, but 25% is really

the pathway to position everything for success, calling it the "landing spot." Erin responded that 50% is where it's going to be "for now" due to an audit finding, and ADS isn't ready to reduce it further.

### **Discussion of Task Force Recommendations:**

Senator Lesser then asked if there were any further comments by members, to which Lena Rodriguez replied that she wishes to "revisit" what the goals of the task force were from the beginning to see if they were meeting them. She then stated that there are efficiencies that still need to be addressed and brought up that she has over a million dollars in outstanding payments. Senator Lesser then asked the Clerk of the Human Services Committee, Chandra Persaud, to bring up the original legislation to go over the goals of the task force. Senator Lesser and Lena discussed to what extent the goals were being met. She then asked Erin how much Form V was being utilized, and Erin replied that the forms are used towards the "state performance report," an annual report from ACL.

Senator Lesser then asked about establishing a waitlist for programs, to which Erin replied that the "funding is not equal to where the need is" and that there is not a standard report that considers prioritization, but that it's more of a manual process. Lena and Erin then discussed if the State has ever compiled the data from Form V to get an idea of funding allocations, and/or different determinations on who/where the funding goes towards. Senator Lesser then asked if Form V was used if/when waitlists had been established, to which Marie answered that they had. She discussed different assessments and "risk scores" that help make those determinations on the regional level. Lena then asked if the data was utilized for any particular purpose, and Marie replied that without the data they wouldn't qualify for federal funding. Erin added that the data helps to show that they're serving the target populations.

Senator Lesser said that he wanted to encourage streamlining and reduction in "paperwork burden." Joel Sekorski then stated that items one through four in the original legislation were talked about and agreed upon. He said that they can streamline it and it'll somewhat help, but there have to be changes to how money gets allocated and it depends on the federal government. Lena specified that while a lot does depend on the federal government, there are a lot of inefficiencies that need to be corrected at the state level as well. Marie added that some of those inefficiencies should be addressed in the recommendations that are being discussed in the working group.

Senator Lesser asked Maureen McIntyre if the 50% would help to resolve Lena's issues, to which Maureen responded that it is "absolutely" going to help alleviate Lena's concerns, but that it would take "sizeable changes" to make the whole system work better for everyone. Lena responded that this isn't a regional issue, but rather an issue among all providers, especially with regards to payment and timeliness of payment. She went on to ask the group about the accomplishments of the task force, as well as the outcomes. Alison Dvorak replied that she thinks the task force has "brought to light" important issues that need to be addressed, including the cadence of payments. She

specified that while there have been accomplishments brought about by the task force, there's still a lot to be done.

Senator Lesser asked about "other deliverables" that are out there and discussed with Erin the difference between CORE-CT and WellSky, and whether or not there's able to be an audit of CORE-CT data/information. Alison and Bill added that they do participate with CORE-CT directly. Senator Lesser then discussed with Erin who to direct his question to in an effort to reduce the "administrative burden," and she explained that it's a "big change" to have to alter databases. Erin went on to further explain that CORE-CT isn't a data collection database, but rather a fiscal system. Lena then asked if it was the system itself or the processes to get the data into the system that caused the delays and inefficiencies, and Alison replied that things have recently improved with regard to moving funds. Erin added that while there may be efficiencies in one area, there may be inefficiencies in other areas that can cause delays.

Senator Lesser asked about the Grantee Gateway, to which Marie replied that it's a system created by the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging between WellSky and grantees in order to identify the "real holdup in payments." Senator Lesser then asked if that's something to be made available to the other AAAs, and Marie replied that it can be shared but there are costs associated with that process.

Senator Lesser said that he's interested in exploring the SNAP ideas that were mentioned earlier and told the group that he'd be discussing this with DSS following the conclusion of the meeting.

Michelina Buchino said that she and her mother are going to have to "explore something new" in regards to congregate meals, and they need to make a shift over to residential meals. She was going to let the group know how the process works and how the transition operates.

Senator Lesser said that they'd be in touch about a meeting in January, but asked if the group had any final thoughts on the SNAP ideas that were discussed during the meeting. Marie replied that the average payment for an older adult was \$250 per month and that they ended up having to supplement the meals. Senator Lesser asked if anyone does in-person SNAP enrollments, to which Marie, Alison, and Lena replied that they do. (A note - All five AAAs do SNAP assessments in-person, virtually, or over the phone). Senator Lesser then asked if they see any barriers at either congregate sites or for home-delivered meals. Lena stated that both she and Bill could do a deep dive into how many users of the Meals-on-Wheels program are also on SNAP.

### **Adjournment:**

Seeing no other discussion, Senator Lesser adjourned the meeting at 11:24 AM.

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Task Force Administrator

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Austin Hyatt  
Minutes Prepared by

