

Elderly Nutrition Program Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 31, 2024

3:00 PM Zoom Remote Meeting and [YouTube Live](#)

The meeting was called to order at 3:04 PM 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, Michelina Buchino, Joel Sekorski, Erin Estey, Bill Rybczyk, Sarah Leathers, Stan Mingione,

Absent were: Aleck Spinks, Eugene Theroux

Remarks by the Chairs:

Co-Chair Senator Lesser made opening remarks and stated that there was a limited agenda but hoped that there could be a thorough discussion of the final recommendations of the task force.

Co-Chair Representative Gilchrest thanked the Task Force members for their time for coming together to work over the past months and stated that she was looking forward to the conversation.

Approval of Minutes – November 29, 2023 and December 19, 2023:

Senator Lesser asked the group if there was a motion to approve the minutes from the last meetings on November 29th and December 19th. Representative Gilchrest motioned first, and Erin Estey seconded. Senator Lesser then asked if there was any discussion, and seeing none, he called for a voice vote to approve the minutes. The meeting minutes from November 29th and December 19th were approved.

Discussion of Final Recommendations:

Moving on, Senator Lesser began the meeting by moving on to the discussion of the final recommendations of the Task Force. Senator Lesser thanked the associations present and the department for the input that the Task Force can do. He also acknowledged that “things have been getting better” and streamlined, such as allowing funds to be expended from 75% down to 50%. Senator Lesser began to discuss what he took away from the Task Force in terms of recommendations, going through each item.

Senator Lesser began the conversation by starting with the first recommendation to codify the requirement that AAAs can seek additional funding from SUA on 50% expenditure rather than 75% and provide payment within 30 days when possible. Senator Lesser then asked if there was any conversation on the recommendation item.

Bill Rybczyk noted that based on previous discussions, there is a desire to reach 25% expenditure in order to ensure that outcomes are met. Bill then asked if it is possible to add language to the recommendation that states the feasibility of 25% expenditure will be reviewed annually. Senator Lesser noted that feedback from the SUA was provided and that 25% expenditure did not seem feasible. However, Senator Lesser recommended that language ensuring the ADS will report annually on the feasibility going to 25% be in the recommendation. Bill thought that this language would be “agreeable”.

Erin Estey noted that from SUA’s perspective, if it is in a recommendation, then an annual report can be “looked at”.

Lena Rodriguez commented that payment within 30 days should be the norm as it is what is stated in the contract language. Lena noted that anything beyond 30 days should only be for extenuating circumstances. Senator Lesser noted that there are questions if this is possible when funds are not available. Lena recommended that language should note if funds are available in the state, then the contract says payment should be provided within 30 days, as this would be better for providers.

Marie Allen asked to clarify that there are two stopping points, the first being upon request of additional payments by providers, in which the providers must wait until they have expended 50% of funds, then based on the contact with SUA they have 45 days to pay AAAs. Then the AAA's must get the payment to ENP providers. Marie noted that AAAs will look at internal workflows and they are excited to use granted gateways, as it will allow invoices to be provided in an appropriate timeframe. Marie also noted that AAA's are looking into electronic fund transfers rather than checks as checks have a variety of variables that may affect payment.

Lena Rodriguez then asked Erin Estey about the timeline of payment when funds are at the state level, as well as if there are any ways to streamline payment. Erin noted that streamlining is something that SUA is working on, and it is a goal to get payments out much quicker than the contracted 45 days.

Senator Lesser asked Erin Estey if the current requirement is to get out payment within 40 days of the request by AAAs. Erin clarified that the current requirement is to provide payment within 45 days of the request by AAAs. Senator Lesser then asked what would happen if that was switched to 30 days. Erin noted that would go through contract revisions and the ADS fiscal department. Senator Lesser then asked about the impacts of lack of funding under current law. Erin stated that under current law, if the funds are unavailable, then ADS must wait until funds are available to pay the AAAs.

Senator Lesser then recommended that two different recommendation points be made, one codifying the 50% threshold and requiring ADS to report on the feasibility of moving down to 25%, the second being going from 45 days to 30 days for payment from the SUA to AAAs. Senator Lesser also recommended language be included that this would be upheld by the law unless there be a lack of funds. Senator Lesser asked if members were in agreement with the prior two provisions and noted that a formal vote would be conducted at the end of the meeting.

Senator Lesser moved on to the following recommendation, which requires ADS and AAAs to report to the Human Services Committee on progress in streamlining the contracting process and streamlining Form V. Erin Estey asked Senator Lesser to clarify that Form V is different from the contracting process. Senator Lesser asked if any of the members were opposed to the recommendation. Lena Rodriguez asked, if possible if language could include preparing an initial plan or assessment and subsequently reporting on the progress. Senator Lesser agreed that such language would be possible. Senator Lesser asked if there was any further discussion. Seeing no further discussion, Senator Lesser moved on to the following recommendation.

Moving on to the third recommendation, which requires notification to legislative delegation and chief elected officials by AAA when there is a material change in service levels or when a provider is changed, and when an ENP provider is changed requires SUA to require the completion of a continuity of effort plan submitted with input from each CEO and relevant stakeholders in each town. Senator Lesser noted that this recommendation would help with gaps in service delivery. Lena Rodriguez noted “that makes sense.” Senator Lesser asked if there was any other discussion. Bill Rybczyk asked for clarification on what would constitute a material change in service levels. Senator Lesser noted that as the items are recommendations to the Human Services Committee, there is not a need to dictate what material change in service levels, however, if desired, those notes can be made. Senator Lesser asked if there were any other questions or comments.

Senator Lesser subsequently moved on to the fourth recommendation, which asks Aging CT to make funding for Granting Gateway for all AAAs. Senator Lesser asked Marie Allen for her thoughts on this matter. Marie noted that OPM has not yet announced the awardees for bond funding to non-profit organizations. Marie noted that they are hopeful and that more information on funding will come when OPM releases the list of awardees. Senator Lesser asked if anything was preventing the recommendation that OPM fund Granting Gateway. Marie noted that OPM would fund the technology to streamline the process, and the belief is that Granting Gateway has the best opportunity for success as it is specific to Connecticut. Marie recommended that instead of naming Granting Gateway in the recommendation, mention technology for streamlining the process for grant databases. Lena asked if this was funding for all five AAAs. Marie confirmed that the application was put in for all five AAAs. Senator Lesser confirmed the language of the recommendation with the members.

Moving forward, Senator Lesser brought forth the fifth recommendation which would request the Human Services Committee Co-Chairs write to the congressional delegation requesting assistance in understanding OAA Funding reducing delays and requesting increased federal funding. Senator Lesser opened the discussion to comments and questions. Lena noted it was “an excellent recommendation.” Maureen McIntyre noted that Connecticut was fortunate to have a responsive and well-educated legislative delegation.

Seeing no further discussion, Senator Lesser moved on to the sixth recommendation which would maximize SNAP availability for participants. Senator Lesser opened the floor to any recommendations from Task Force members. Bill Rybczyk recommended gathering current data related to participants and analyzing it to determine how much of SNAP availability is not being maximized. Bill recommended all ENPs get together to

cross-analyze this data. Senator Lesser proposed that AAAs, and SUA require an annual report on SNAP enrollment to the Human Services Committee.

Erin Estey made the distinction that not all ENP providers are community action agencies, and thus would not have access to such information, nor would SUA. Lena Rodriguez noted that AAAs would help seniors who are eligible to go on SNAP.

Marie Allen asked to keep in mind that AAAs have a half-time person dedicated to the nutrition program, and this individual is responsible for doing intakes and nutrition assessments, as well as entering that data into the federal database. Thus, there may be a lack of staffing. Marie noted that it is important to ensure that AAAs have adequate staff levels of service navigators who can respond to nutritional needs. Marie also recommended that there be a way to confirm if individuals are on SNAP, as AAAs do not have access to that information and would rely on self-reporting surveys.

Lena Rodriguez noted that the CAP agencies do outreach for SNAP and have staffing that helps with SNAP applications. Thus, Lena recommended that there be an established connection with CAP agencies to do a referral. Marie noted that in her region she does not have CAP agencies who are part of the nutrition program. Lena stated that the CAP agencies can still serve and help make referrals. Marie noted that attempts have been made in the past, however, they will attempt again. Alison Dvorak noted that it is a “multi-pronged approach” and multiple individuals screen participants for what programs they are eligible for. Bill Rybczyk asked if there is an ability to do a data match with DSS, as access to data has been noted as an issue.

Maureen McIntyre stated it is important to look at this situation through a “root cause approach.” Maureen noted that when SNAP is looked at as an opportunity to enhance older adults to food, the assumption is that accessibility is financial, however, it may be frailty, transportation, language, or literacy. Maureen stated it would be helpful to look at this situation by what is the root of the issue. Maureen noted that this may be a way to reduce stress on the ENP as it has finite resources. Senator Lesser asked what the other ways look like. Maureen recommended investing in a root cause analysis to find other ways of serving the older adult population, which may not be the ENP as we know it. Senator Lesser suggested that the Task Force provide recommendations that may turn into legislation, but also provide additional areas of interest to the Human Services Committee, such as exploring root cause analysis. Marie noted that there is a responsibility to identify the barriers to nutrition, however much of the information can be provided at intake, in which referrals can then be made.

Senator Lesser moved on to the following recommendation which requests an increase in state funding for the Elderly Nutrition Program by \$5.5 million per year. Senator Lesser noted that prospects for increasing funding may be difficult based on the “fiscal year spending cap.” Senator Lesser also asked if the \$5.5 million number came from anywhere in particular. Bill Rybczyk noted that around a year ago there was \$2.2 million that was allocated to ENP providers. Bill mentioned that all nine ENP providers had formed an \$11 million number over two years based on data analysis, and that is how the \$5.5 million request came to be. Senator Lesser indicated he was comfortable putting the \$5.5 million figure in the recommendation. Joel Sekorski reiterated that the \$11 million figure came from data following 2019 and how many individuals were in need, the cost of rising food, and increasing quality.

Senator Lesser then followed with the next recommendation, which would provide one-time funding from OPM to SUA to allow a three-month carryforward of the program to the following federal fiscal year. Senator Lesser asked for a discussion on this item. Marie Allen and Bill Rybczyk agreed with this recommendation. Joel Sekorski, upon needing to leave, thanked both Senator Lesser and Representative Gilchrest for their hard work with the Task Force.

Seeing no further discussion on the prior recommendation, Senator Lesser asked if there was anything Task Force members would like to bring forth regarding recommendations. Seeing no further discussion, Senator Lesser moved to acknowledge any necessary changes to the proposed recommendations based on prior conversation throughout this meeting. Senator Lesser recommended that the recommendations be polished and sent to Task Force members through an email format.

Senator Lesser asked the group if there was a motion to adopt draft recommendations, with the understanding that they would become final recommendations once refined. Lena Rodriguez motioned first, and Bill Rybczyk seconded. A voice vote was held and the motion passed. One abstention was made by Erin Estey and four members were absent at the time of the vote.

Adjournment:

Seeing no other discussion, Senator Lesser adjourned the meeting at 4:14 PM.

Chandra Persaud
Task Force Administrator

Jessica Elizondo
Minutes Prepared by