**Governor’s Council to Address Aging in Massachusetts**

**Monday, October 25th, 2021**

**2:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**\*\*The meeting was held via Zoom\*\***

**In attendance:** Co-Chair Eileen Connors, Bill Caplin, Secretary Elizabeth Chen, Rosanne DiStefano, Beth Dugan, Assistant Secretary Kate Fichter, Tom Grape, Steven Kaufman, Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox, Nora Moreno Cargie, Ruth Moy, Alicia Munnell, Brian O’Grady, Tom Riley, Amy Schectman, and Alice Sweeney.

**Not present:** Co-Chair Secretary Marylou Sudders**,** Joe Coughlin, and Kevin Dumas.

**Council Staff:** Deputy Secretary Robin Lipson, Emily Cooper, Pam MacLeod, Amanda Bernardo, Kathryn Downes, Molly Evans, and William Travascio.

**Other Presenters:** Alexandra Drane, CEO of ARCHANGELS

**Documents:** October 25th, 2021 Meeting Agenda, Draft Minutes from the May 17th, 2021 Meeting, and the October 25th, 2021 Meeting Deck.

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM by Council Co-Chair Eileen Connors and EOEA Secretary Elizabeth Chen, who Secretary Sudders asked to co-chair the meeting on her behalf. Both welcomed all Council members and visitors. All Council members in attendance approved the May 17th, 2021 meeting minutes.

Secretary Chen noted that 99% of all those who are 65 and older in Massachusetts have been vaccinated. Recently booster shots became available for this population as well, at this time we have not heard of anyone having difficulty getting access. Through the work of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, there are hundreds of local clinics statewide where an older adult can be vaccinated. The administration has also submitted its proposal to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Massachusetts has been allocated approximately $500 million for HCBS in the ARPA bill.

Deputy Secretary Robin Lipson shared that since the last meeting of the Council, the second annual progress report of the Age-Friendly State Plan has been submitted to AARP. It has quickly become a resource for other states. Nora Moreno Cargie felt that the work mentioned in the plan submitted to AARP is sustainable and strong because it originates at the local level. She added that over the last two years, Massachusetts has been recognized at the Grantmakers in Aging (GIA) Annual Conference. This year the SCAN Foundation co-presented with the Tufts Health Plan Foundation. New York and New Jersey are modeling their approaches to age-friendly policies based on work in Massachusetts, after having met with Nora and the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative (MHAC).

Other states including California, Florida, and Colorado regularly reach out to gain insight on Age-Friendly work for their state and how collaboration is happening on multiple levels and with state government. Partnerships are at the heart of our successes. Nora noted that UMass Boston has been a key partner as well, as they have provided cases studies including one soon to be released about collaborative integrated approaches on age and age-friendly. Deputy Secretary Lipson and other stakeholders recently presented at a statewide conference about the Dementia Friends program. Technology as a social determinate of health, isolation, access to services, and mobile markets were all themes that were discussed. The Tufts Health Plan Foundation has led trainings during this time to reframe aging, including one that brought together leaders from across New England.

Next, Deputy Secretary Lipson invited Amy Schectman to talk about recent housing developments at 2Life Communities. Amy noted that in September 2020, 2Life Communities opened a 62-unit fully affordable housing property in Brookline. 2Life received applications from over 778 households. Currently two projects are underway: one would add 68 affordable units to Golda Meir house, and another currently under construction will add 142 affordable units to the Brighton campus. A PACE center being built on the first floor will be a model for health and housing integration. 2Life is also proposing to build 70 units across from the Waltham Senior Center. Work is also being done to design a 152-unit affordable housing building on the campus of the former Union Hospital in Lynn. The building will also have a PACE center on the first floor, and it will abut the Mass General Brigham’s new ambulatory clinic. 62-units are being permitted in Shirley.

Amy mentioned a 174-unit project in Newton named Opus that just passed the City Council 22-0. It will be geared for people who are lower income, but do not qualify for affordable housing. Those living in the community will also be volunteers in the building- this will help to keep the costs low. There will be six different kinds of units within the building. The marketing campaign to promote Opus goes live November 3rd. Amy added that this is going to become a national model and was mentioned in the Wall Street Journal. If it is successful, then it will be replicated.

Alicia Munnell asked about income limits. Amy responded that the target is 80 to 130% of the area median income. There is an initial investment called a “Community Share” which will be no more than 50% of the average single family home price in Needham, Newton, Natick, Brookline, and Waltham. Meals, utilities, and social activities are also included in the cost. No more than 30% of a person’s income will go to housing.

Next, Secretary Chen presented on workforce challenges. She noted that this challenge is not unique to Massachusetts or the social services industry. There is a bit of a lag, but labor participation is beginning to get back to where it was before the pandemic according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Assistance with activities of daily living is key to helping older adults age in the community. Without a stable and growing workforce to support them, more older adults will transition to facility-based care. In the short-term, employers should look at flexible scheduling to reduce travel time for home care aide workers, among other actions to retain their workers.

The Secretary then spoke about EOEA’s Personal and Home Care Aide State Training (PHCAST) that has been available online for approximately 6 months. The training is free and currently only offered in English. It will soon be available in Spanish and Haitian Creole. 63% of those who started the training have completed it, which is a higher completion rate than in-person trainings. 45% of those taking the training are under 30, despite the fact that, the home care workforce tends to be about a decade older. Over half of those who have completed the training have a high school diploma or less. Currently the training is being shared within the Aging Services Network, however ARPA money has been applied to help with promotion.

Amy Schectman said that 2Life Communities has not lost anyone on their team that provides services to older adults in their communities. 2Life’s entry wages are higher than those of the state’s minimum wage and all workers get a package of benefits. 3% of each worker’s wages goes into a 401k.

Tom Grape mentioned that Benchmark is looking at all positions and is doing a market rate adjustment. This has helped a bit with retention and has helped significantly with hiring. Departure rates have not been higher than they have been historically.

Tom Riley said that thus far during the pandemic, his company’s retention rate has been nearly 100%. He felt that the combination of work life balance, benefits structure, and 401k match have kept people. His company has also enacted some of the same incentives as Tom Grape’s company: higher starting wages, bonuses, and market rate adjustments. Something that surprised Tom is the number of field clinicians that have trepidation over getting vaccinated. Another concern has come from those who are working at home who now are being asked to go back into the field, which has resulted in staff leaving their positions.

Secretary Chen noted that the in-person services piece is still incredibly important, especially when it comes to assisting with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). The pandemic has made it harder to find individuals to fill openings because so many have left the industry.

Deputy Secretary Lipson noted that Amy Schectman’s Opus housing model helps to reduce costs because the volunteers are doing work that would otherwise be done by facility staff. It also gives purpose to those living there.

Secretary Chen then recognized Alex Drane of ARCHANGELS, a woman-owned Massachusetts-based start-up. The organization seeks to support caregivers, currently 43% of adults in the US are providing unpaid caregiving support. 70% of that 43% experience at least one adverse mental health impact, including anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts. 23% of adults in the US are sandwich generation caregivers, meaning that they care for both children and an older adult. 85% of those sandwich generation caregivers are experiencing at least one of those adverse mental impacts, and 52% are actively experiencing suicidal ideations, or severe suicidal thoughts in the last 30 days.

Last month, ARCHANGELS in collaboration with the MassTech Collaborative and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts launched a marketing campaign called “Any Care Counts.” It is a nod to the many caregivers who do not consider themselves, or identify as, caregivers. The campaign is rolling out with employers, faith-based leaders, and others. The concept helps caregivers to identify as caregivers and directs them to the Caregiver Intensity Index, a 2-minute tool that validates one’s caregiving intensity. The Index helps identify leading drivers of one’s intensity and factors that can help alleviate one’s burden. Some leading factors can be familial stress or financial stress. Some alleviating factors can be support at work and feeling prepared. Through this program individuals can be connected with MassOptions and the Family Caregiver Support Program.

The campaign is about engaging people who otherwise would not see themselves as caregivers. The data collected can be used to inform legislation. Alex added that the data mentioned in today’s presentation can be found at Archangels.me, and more information on the campaign is available at AnyCareCountsMA.com.

Alex wrapped up by adding that caregiving is a skill, one that can be added to one’s resume because it requires acquiring expertise in multiple of areas. Archangels encourages businesses to hire people who were unpaid caregivers because of these skills.

Secretary Chen thanked Alex for her presentation. She thanked businesses for their partnership in framing caregiving as a workforce issue. She added that she also took the Caregiver Intensity Index and found it to be revealing. It is easy to compartmentalize our roles and responsibilities. Deputy Secretary Lipson added that it is critical to support unpaid caregivers because the paid careforce would not be able to do it all.

Tom Riley spoke to the importance of fostering a culture to where caregivers can share their experiences and embrace them, and how that transforms a business from an employer to a community of support. Amy Schectman offered Alex an opportunity to visit 2Life Communities to spread her message about ARCHANGELS.

Secretary Chen then asked the Council members what they believe the Council should make more strides in as we look ahead to the next few years. Alicia Munnell expressed the need for an auto-IRA program. Half of the population does not have a retirement plan that is adequate for them. California, Oregon, Illinois, and New York have all begun pilot programs. This is an area where Massachusetts can lead.

Beth Dugan echoed Alicia’s comments. She said that many UMass Boston students want to save for retirement, but do not have a way to do it. Building financial security is crucial and will have a big payoff in the long run. There are studies that show having some financial stability is just as important as access to care.

Steve Kaufman gave kudos to the EOEA team for writing the second annual progress report of the Age-Friendly State Plan, he felt it is an incredible document.

Eileen Connors closed the meeting by thanking the presenters and the Council members for attending.

The meeting adjourned at 3:23 PM.