



Wes Moore | Governor

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**Maryland Department of Aging
Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget
Response To Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

**House Appropriations Committee
Health And Social Services Subcommittee
Delegate Kirill Reznik, Chair
Delegate Emily Shetty, Vice Chair
February 23, 2023**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Health And Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Cory McCray, Chair
March 6, 2023**

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) analysis of the Maryland Department of Aging's (Department's) FY 2024 budget request. The Department extends its appreciation to the DLS analyst, Naomi Komoro, who reviewed the budget and programs. Ms. Komoro's questions have been thought provoking and insightful. The Department's response to the discussion items and the recommendations noted in the analysis are included below.

Discussion Items

1. MDOA should comment on recruitment efforts taken to fill vacant positions and how the department plans to use its vacancy savings.

MDOA continues to expand its recruitment efforts to fill vacant positions. As required for certain positions, the Department posts its open positions on the state job board. In addition, the Department posts those positions on Indeed to reach a broader audience and direct qualified candidates to the state job board. The Department further uses Indeed to find skilled candidates to fill contract and managerial positions. MDOA posts job openings on its website, as well as on its social media platforms.

The Department has engaged its employees to share referrals using their personal and highly qualified contact networks. Additionally, MDOA has shared openings with its external national, federal, and local organizations to have those partners share openings

through their networks, as well as offer referrals. The Department also utilizes Maryland college and university platforms to post open positions to recruit recent graduates to the aging network. MDOA continues to refer back to past candidate resumes and reaches out to previous Department employees.

Unfortunately MDOA, like its local and federal partners, are facing challenges to recruit qualified candidates to the aging workforce. MDOA has continued to find it difficult to compete in the job market. Factors include the length of time required to complete the state hiring process, lack of competitive wages and benefits packages, and full-time remote work opportunities. The lack of parking for state employees in Baltimore City has continued to add to the inability to compete in the job market.

As a department, MDOA relies on contract employees to fill needed gaps in its workforce. Unfortunately, those positions are not as attractive in the current market. The inability to find candidates is further exacerbated by the lack of available parking or use of free public transportation. That expense, coupled with lower salaries and unpaid holidays, has halted conversations with viable candidates.

To further increase its workforce, the Department must have the opportunity to convert contract PINs to regular state PINs. This will afford the Department the ability to incentivize candidates to stay with the Department as opposed to seeking other opportunities. While vacant regular PINs exist within the Department, those are all already identified for needs within MDOA. Additional regular state PINs are needed to appropriately administer the programs necessary to serve the growing older adult population.

Filling vacancies and increasing staff is a priority for this Department. To assist with hiring, MDOA intends to hire an individual to manage the recruitment process. That individual will be responsible for managing the process from start to finish and tracking recruitment efforts.

MDOA intends to use its vacancy savings to offer more competitive salaries while it is recruiting for its current vacant positions. Once filled, the salaries for those positions will reduce the vacancy savings.

2. Waitlists

Waitlists are managed locally by the 19 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and are based on a number of factors that differ for each jurisdiction. As with all programs, each jurisdiction decides whether to provide services under a different program, to use local funding if available, or to put a constituent on a waitlist. This ensures flexibility within the local programs to better serve the needs of their specific local older adult population. Given this, it is difficult to compare one AAA waitlist data to another AAA's data.

Current funding levels are sufficient to cover the needs of individuals already receiving care, but do not allow for an expansion of services to those on the waitlist. The Senior Care funding, while increased, cannot serve more individuals as the costs for services and products continue to rise and the needs of each older adult in the community increases.

The maximum allowable subsidy for SALS, which was recently raised to \$1,000 monthly, is barely enough to assist an older adult and their families to meet the agreed rate to live in assisted living. The assisted living industry is changing and we are trending with lower numbers of facilities participating in the program. These facilities are the last stop to keep an individual in the community, before higher levels of care as needed.

Finding providers who want to participate in the CHSP continues to be a struggle given the complexity of managing the program for providers. MDOA posted a request for proposal which resulted in zero applicants. The Department intends to review the regulations related to this program and the complexity in provider reporting requirements. That review will result in changes to entice more providers to participate in this program.

Looking ahead, it is important for the Department to evaluate the established funding formulas to achieve equity in the funding. MDOA will use lessons learned from existing funding formulas to transform them into equitable solutions. AAAs will be engaged to review the formulas for equitability and evaluate the dynamics of population growth with the relevance of the formula. Additionally, MDOA will review relevant legislation and regulations to ensure the changes are properly implemented. Finally, the Department must ensure that provided state funding is sustainable year over year so that constituents receive the services for as long as they are part of the program.

3. MDOA should describe how it is supporting the jurisdictions with substantial portions of unspent federal stimulus funds to ensure that all funds are expended prior to the expiration date of the funding.

The stimulus funds provided a large influx of funding to the aging network. The AAAs received stimulus funding through MDOA, but also stimulus funds received directly at the local level. Each of these sources had spending deadlines that differed. The AAAs were tasked with having to prioritize spending to utilize the funds by the assigned deadline, which may have resulted in MDOA stimulus funds being last spent due to longer deadlines.

Each jurisdiction is afforded flexibility to utilize the stimulus funding received from MDOA within the purview of the Older Americans Act. New concepts are presented regularly to MDOA staff for consideration and approval. Flexibility is provided to the AAAs to adjust their spending plans throughout the budget period of the stimulus funds.

One of the biggest challenges faced is sustainability of activities once the stimulus funds are gone. This has resulted in AAAs needing to find one-time purchases or activities to utilize the funds. Another challenge has been turnover and staffing vacancies at the local level.

MDOA continuously engages with the jurisdictions, through the AAAs, to provide technical assistance and spending guidance. The state program manager routinely engages with the local program staff, holding regular meetings and discussing expenditures of funds. The Department has one-on-one meetings with AAA leadership to discuss expenditures and plans for spending. It further works with the AAAs to arrange peer mentoring among the jurisdictions.

At the state level, the Department continues to research best practices being utilized nationally, participates in federal calls, and will review guidance provided by its funding partner and trade associations. This information is shared with the AAAs to inform their efforts to provide services at the local level.

The expectation is that all stimulus funding will be spent. Once all stimulus funds have been spent, there will be concerns in future years on how to sustain programs, particularly those around food insecurity.

Recommended Actions

1.) DLS recommends adopting committee narrative requesting an update on fiscal 2023 program participation and waitlists in Senior Care, SALS, and CHSP.

The Department concurs and will submit the reports by the due dates.

2.) DLS recommends adopting committee narrative requesting actual expenditures and projected expenditures for unexpired federal stimulus funding.

The Department concurs and will submit the reports by the due dates.