

Minutes/Notes

March 7, 2023

Blacksburg Recreation Center

Attendees: Don Creamer, Terry Wildman, Leslie Pendleton, Jerry Niles, Pam Knox, Fred Piercy, John Burton, Pat Hipkins, Nola Elliot, Joy Herbert, Beth Grabau, Wendy Baldwin, Judith Jones, Ben Crawford, JessiKa Eglin (Special Guest).

President Leslie Pendleton called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM

The minutes: The minutes from the February 2023 board meeting were considered and approved as written.

Special Guest: JessiKa Eglin, Associate State Director for Advocacy and Outreach, AARP VA (The “Ka” in JessiKa was purposeful. Upon discovering that JessiKa was a twin, her mother chose the spelling from Stephen King’s Ka-tet, Stephen King’s “Dark Tower” series in which Ka-tet means a group brought together by destiny or fate.)

JessiKa’s complete report of AARP’s efforts during the recent legislative session is attached. Herein are brief summaries at the state and federal levels.

Virginia. The largest priorities were/are nursing home staffing standards; Rx affordability (creation of a prescription drug affordability board); and guardianship. Some progress has been made, but the adopted nursing homes standards were cited three times before being sanctioned and the standards do not go into effect for 5 years. Also, there are exemptions for “acts of God.” Another exemption is for nursing homes that are “trying” to meet staff shortages. In response to questions about the use of private contractors to recruit staff, JessiKa stated that the government can’t set salary standards.

If approved, the Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB) could set upper limits for the cost of drugs throughout the supply chain (including individuals). While approved by the Senate, it was defeated in the House.

Several bills related to Guardianship passed the General Assembly, including one which ensures incapacitated persons can communicate; another that guardians must visit incapacitated persons at least 3 times per year; and a bill requiring “periodic” review hearings of guardianship and conservatorship situations.

Federal. In summary, the budget is unknown, so much is still in the air.

A number of “fixes” for Social Security have been discussed including increasing the benefit starting age and building in a “donut hole.” AARP is pushing for long-term solutions that minimize unintended consequences as much as possible.

The SNAP program which was increased during COVID-19 is returning to “normal” levels of funding. Many seniors depend on Social Security and SNAP to survive. Food security is a serious problem for seniors.

Age Discrimination is a problem that 62% of workers over 50 have experienced. Given that so many seniors rely on Social Security as a key part of their retirement income and the reductions in programs like SNAP, fair access to employment is necessary.

AARP VA will host a Zoom meeting on April 20th from 10:00 a.m - 12:00 p.m. focused on advocacy priorities for the next 3 years.

Leslie presented JessiKa with a jar of Mt Tabor Ruritan apple butter, compliments of Ben Crawford.

Nomination: Don shared information about the Community Best Practices Award from the Commonwealth Council on Aging. After a great deal of background work and on behalf of our Board, Don nominated the Aging in Community (AiC) Leadership Team for the award. Nominations were due by March 1, and winners will be announced on May 1.

The AiC Leadership Team is responsible for the Aging in Place/Community materials which are used in workshops (some conducted by Jerry and Leslie) conducted by Virginia Tech, LLI, and organizations throughout the State of Virginia. The Leadership Team is conducting a needs assessment to establish what is being done and what should be done. Next week the Team (which includes representation from 16 organizations), will make the first cuts at a draft report and begin the transition of creating plans identified through the needs assessment.

Committee Reports:

Newsletter. Fred and Pam will finish collecting information for the next newsletter by 15 March. It will take a week or two to produce. A question was asked about whether to announce the Spring Picnic in this issue. Discussion about an event or events in the Spring and/or Fall ensued, including an Oktoberfest event in late September or early October. Five proposed dates were

offered. Terry will pick one to begin planning for the Spring picnic. The Eastern Divide brewery was proposed as a location for the Fall with the 27th of September as the suggested date. Terry will give Fred and Pam the dates, venues, and “blurbs”.

Programs. Wendy and Pat administered a survey to determine the Board’s priorities for future Programs.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:54.

General Assembly Advocacy Update

On Saturday, February 25, 2023, the Virginia General Assembly adjourned *sine die* despite budget negotiators being unable to agree on a budget compromise. Instead, they adopted a “skinny” stopgap budget bill. The “skinny” budget bill included mostly technical fixes, such as funding for a shortfall in revenue for local school systems and funds for the state retirement system. This budget bill allows House and Senate negotiators to work on a broader bill that could address the more than \$3 billion in surplus revenue left unspent this year. If negotiators can come up with an agreement, Governor Youngkin could summon the legislature back to Richmond for a special session to take up the budget.

Of the more than 2,300 bills introduced this year, close to 600 made it to Gov. Youngkin’s desk for consideration. Gov. Youngkin has until Tuesday, March 26, 2023, to approve, veto or offer amendments on the legislation that passed during the final week of session.

- **Nursing Home Staffing:** One of AARP Virginia’s biggest legislative priority was to create nursing home staffing standards in Virginia. The General Assembly passed House Bill 1446, which institutes minimum staffing standards in nursing homes and imposes sanctions on facilities that do not comply, starting July 1, 2025. While volunteers worked tirelessly and successfully this year to advocate for meaningful changes and improvements to the bill, we still have concerns with the legislation, including portions related to exemptions and enforcement. While we are grateful for this first step, we believe that there is still a lot of work to be done to protect at-risk nursing home residents and their families.
- **Rx Affordability:** Another priority was legislation to create a prescription drug affordability board (PDAB). This independent board would have the ability to create upper payment limits for some of the most expensive drugs for Virginians. If passed, the new rates would have applied to all payers throughout the pharmaceutical supply chain, including individual buyers. Senate Bill 957 passed the Senate with bipartisan support but was later defeated in the House. Establishing a PDAB will continue to be a priority for AARP Virginia.
- **Guardianship:** AARP Virginia was supportive of a number of guardianship bills that passed the General Assembly, including House Bill 2027, which will ensure that incapacitated persons are not restricted from communicating with people they have established relationships with; House Bill 2028, which ensures that guardians visit an incapacitated person at least three times a year; and Senate Bill 987, which will require periodic review hearings of guardianships and conservatorships of incapacitated persons.
- **Access to Insulin Equipment:** AARP Virginia supported the passage of House Bill 1409, which will ensure that regulations on medical equipment suppliers do not restrict the distribution of hypodermic needles, syringes or insulin pens by people authorized to dispense insulin for the treatment of diabetes.
- **Utilities:** AARP Virginia supported House Bill 1875, which would have created regulations to stop the termination of public utility services, such as electric, gas, water

or wastewater services, for customers who have had a serious medical condition. House Bill 1875 was killed by the House Commerce and Energy Committee.

Federal Advocacy Update

- **SS/Medicare:** On February 7, 2023, AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins issued the following statement in response to President Biden's State of the Union speech:

“AARP has been crystal clear with Congress and the President: Americans should be able to trust that our leaders will safeguard their hard-earned Social Security and Medicare benefits they have contributed to and earned throughout their lives. That is why we are encouraged to hear this commitment echoed from leaders in both parties – including from President Biden, former President Trump, Speaker McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, Leader Jeffries and others.”

To see the rest of the press release from CEO Jo Ann Jenkins visit [here](#).

- **Age Discrimination:** On February 14, 2023, AARP [sent a letter](#) to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) thanking them for including an increased emphasis on the protection of older workers in their draft strategic planning. AARP testified before EEOC last fall that age discrimination in the workforce is a serious problem that urgently needs to be addressed. A recent AARP survey found that 62% of people age 50-plus working or seeking work had seen or experienced age discrimination.
- **Rx Pricing:** On February 16th, 2023, AARP [sent a letter](#) to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell expressing support for five bills aimed at increasing prescription drug competition and price transparency that recently passed the Senate Judiciary Committee with bipartisan support (S.79, S.113, S.142, S.148, and S.150). AARP is focused on the need to prohibit anticompetitive practices by big drug companies that prevent or delay consumer access to less expensive generic and biosimilar drugs.
- **Veterans Affairs:** On February 24th, 2023, AARP [sent a letter](#) to Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jon Tester and Ranking Member Jerry Moran, expressing support for the bipartisan Expanding Veterans' Options for Long-Term Care Act. This bill would give veterans more options for how and where they can get the long-term care, they need, by establishing a three-year pilot program for long-term care.
- **Nutrition Assistance:** Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, household who received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) were afforded additional food assistance under emergency allotments. Starting in March, Virginians on SNAP will see their benefits return to pre-pandemic levels with decreases expected to average around \$90 per month and in some cases as high as \$250. With the renewal of the Farm Bill this year, nutrition and SNAP benefits will be a large part of AARP's conversation with elected officials. The Farm Bill is renewed every five years and includes the funding for federal programs like SNAP and the Commodity Supplemental