

Tompkins County Office for the Aging

Advisory Committee Meeting

February 24, 2025

Hybrid

9:30am

Members present: Lesser, Dean, Beyers, Izbicki, Roe, Hultberg, Mallison, Stamm

Liaisons: Hillson, Askew, Lynch, Champion, Ella (LLH)

Staff: Bullis, Monroe, Maine, Davis, Lyon

Public: Kathleen Yen

Excused: Evans, Burger, Stuart

1. Lesser called the meeting to order at 9:30am.
2. January minutes approved unanimously.
3. Public comments: Yen mentioned that on 12/17 StateWide and FLIC had a presentation on emergency sheltering during a disaster and it was very interesting. On 2/18 they discussed the Code Blue shelter. Next meeting is 4/15 please contact Jeff Boles at FLIC if interested in attending. Also put in a plug for the SIREN alert system.
4. Member comments: Dean mentioned that he spoke with someone who was trying to get their spouse into the adult social daycare at Longview and was told it is totally full. Monroe acknowledged that we have heard that same thing and we believe they are only open 2 days a week right now. Unfortunate because they are the only ones in Tompkins County.

Lesser talked about the new plan from INHS to build senior living apartments across the street from COFA. Lesser suggested having someone from INHS come and speak to this group about the plans. It's good news.

5. COFA Update:
 - PERS report:
 - Between 2023 and 2024 we saw a significant increase in fall protection and GPS units in comparison to the standard unit.

Hultberg asked if the GPS unit was separated from the phone. Yes, it is, it's a unit that goes with you. Davis explained that it is a stand-alone unit, doesn't hook into a landline or cell phone and you can wear it around your neck or on your wrist.

Lesser asked about the gifts and donations. How do we advertise that? Maine stated that we send out contribution requests to all PERS clients. Any contributed money goes right back into the program. We are required to ask clients are not required to contribute.

- In 2024, 95 units were installed for new clients, 86 units were removed, and staff fielded 195 service calls (when anyone has any issues with their units- low battery, loss of service, etc.)
- Total unduplicated clients decreased from 421 in 2023 to 412 in 2024.
- Lisa will send out the full demographic spreadsheet. Monroe stated that it's pretty consistent from year to year.
- COFA's 4-year plan has been approved by NYSOFA. Still waiting for some of the notification of grant awards to finish up our budgeting and resolutions.
- Every year our state association creates an advocacy binder for us broken down by region and county. Monroe will share this binder with the committee.
- Bullis stated that we are still accepting nominations for Outstanding Volunteer. Currently we have no nominations.

6. Liaison Reports:

a. Askew: StateWide-

- 2/25 Patient Advocate Teach in on complaining about hospital care to the State Department of Health, 10am-11am
- Completed their second budget briefing; those recordings are located on their website
- Weekly Roundup is a great place to stay updated on all the changes happening
- Still receiving a lot of calls on frauds. The new card scam is still the number one scam they are getting calls about. AI technology is allowing scammers to use fake voices.

Roe stated that she talked about this at a senior meeting, and they talked about the fact that seniors should have a code word with their family so that if they get a call, they can ask for the code word and if they don't have it then they know it's not real

- Receiving more calls from people who have problems with medical billing
- Still working through open enrollment for Medicare advantage plans.

Roe asked about their concern with funding for their 800 helpline and if that was still an issue. Askew stated that every year they make sure that they ask for their patient's rights funding to at least stay the same, this year trying to get more. Roe asked for the fraud resources.

Lesser added that Askew recommended looking at our medical bills, however, that's not always easy. Sometimes the numbers don't make a lot of sense to us. Askew agreed and stated that people should call StateWide for assistance in understanding the bills.

b. Hillson: TCWH-

- Community Health Survey is open for one more week. They have heard from a lot of older adults in our community. They have about 1200 responses; over 30% were 65+. The information gathered from the survey will be incorporated into their community health assessment.

Lesser asked about the Whole Health Director search. Hillson stated that the job description has not been posted yet, but human resources and administration are actively working on getting that out. In the meantime, Jeremy Porter is their interim commissioner and has been with the department for a long time.

- c. Lynch: FLIC-
- They continue to enroll people and their aides for the continuation of their CDPAP services through the new company, PPL. It seems likely that they will do an extension because the numbers just aren't there yet for the April 1st deadline. A lot of people are nervous about getting it done.
 - Jan is the chair of the Community Services Board and right now they are working on the job description for the TC Whole Health Director. What they are finding right now is that the current description is very much slanted towards public health, and they feel that it is important to incorporate mental health, developmental disabilities and substance use along with public health. They are working on the job description being reflective of that.
- d. Champion: TC Legislature-
- Has decided after 8 years, will not be running for reelection
 - Trying to understand all the information coming from the federal government and stay on top of the changing information.
 - Working on plans for building the shelter; big, complex issue that will be ongoing.
 - New county administrator has been with us for almost 2 months. He's very enthusiastic and excited to be in Tompkins County. Very service oriented.
 - Adding 2 seats to the legislature for a total of 16; at least 7 current legislators are not running for reelection. Will be a big turnover.
- e. Ella for Lindhorst: Love Living at Home-
- Ella is the new Services Coordinator at LLH. This is a new part time position.

Lesser asked what this position entails. Ella responded that she will be the one in the office every day from 9am-2pm. She will help to connect members with volunteers and making sure programming is available to all their members. She will also be working to bring in new members and volunteers.

Lesser stated that COFA has been inquiring for the last few months on the liaison from the TC Library with no response. Due to recent news reports, we suspect it may be a while before a liaison is with us again.

- f. Monroe for Burger: Lifelong-
- Liza is on vacation. She wanted to mention that Lifelong's tax program continues and it is likely that they will fill all available appointments. Please reach out for an appointment time as needed.
 - New program funded through the Health Foundation of Western and Central NY called the Memories Music Café. This is a café that will be held every other month starting tentatively March 18th. This program is primarily intended for caregivers and their care receivers as well as isolated adults. It is free of charge and will feature live music, a simple lunch, and provide an opportunity to connect with others in a supportive

and compassionate environment. More information is located on their website

- g. Monroe for Stuart: VNS-
 - VNS has completed the pre-work for a grant called Capable. This grant is an evidenced based program on aging in place where an RN or OT and a handy man worker would go into the community to help keep people in their homes as long as possible. Monroe stated it is very similar to what the Certified Aging in Place Specialists do at COFA. Capable is an evidence-based program and is very prescriptive. If VNS is chosen for the grant they will know by March or April.
7. Discussion: Kate Lyon, Aging Services Specialist/Long Term Care Ombudsman Coordinator at COFA- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) advocates for residents who live in nursing homes, adult care facilities, and family type homes
 - Ombudsmen assist families as needed, provide information and assistance, and investigate complaints and resolve problems.
 - This program is funded under the Older Americans Act. Every state is required to have a program like this, but each state runs it a little differently.
 - In NYS, we have an independent Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman which is housed inside the New York State Office for the Aging. There are 15 regional program sponsors who provide coverage for approximately 1,400 facilities and over 163,000 long-term care beds.
 - We are Region 12 and cover 3 counties: Tompkins, Chemung and Schuyler, covering 21 facilities and just over 1,300 beds. In the first quarter of 2025, they received 466 calls.
 - In addition to routine access visits and complaint investigation, local ombudsmen also mediate conflicts, provide facility staff training, conduct systems advocacy efforts, provide outreach and community education, recruit volunteers, provide technical assistance to Resident Councils, participate in Department of Health (DOH) surveys, and participate in 18 hours of continuing education/year.
 - Volunteers and new staff are required to go through a 38-hour training plus 10 hours of pre and post shadowing with a certified Ombudsmen.
 - Currently have 3 staff and 5 volunteers who work on the program.
 - Current focus is on Personal Needs Allowance (PNA), budget increase, facility fees, discharge/transfer tracking.
 - PNA is the only amount of money residents whose stay is paid for by Medicaid get for their spending needs. That amount is currently \$50/ month and has not been raised since 1987. There is a new bill out that would amend the law to increase the PNA from \$50/month to \$200/month.
 - Budget increase: received extra funding in their budget last year. However, more is needed in order to hire more staff which would allow them to focus more on outreach
 - Facility Fees: the State of Ohio charges each facility \$15 per bed to help fund their LTCOP. Currently working on bringing this to NYS.
 - Effective March 2025, nursing homes will be required to send all discharge notices to the ombudsmen program, rather than the current standard of just sending facility-initiated discharge notices. In 2024 the program received 20,000

facility-initiated discharge notices (statewide). With this change LTCOP is expecting to receive over 60,000 notices and provide follow-up.

Lesser asked if their budget was all federal or did it include state funding. Lyon responded that it is both. Monroe stated that it is a lot like COFA's funding in that the federal funding is funneled through the state. When you do advocacy, you advocate for both federal and state funding.

Izbicki asked what the difference was between all discharge notices and facility-initiated discharge notices. Lyon explained that facility-initiated discharge notices are generally when a facility decides the resident is going to be discharged. There are only so many reasons that a facility can do that. All other discharges include resident chosen discharges, discharges to hospitals, etc.

Izbicki asked if we were concerned about the Older Americans Act being a target of cuts. Monroe responded that it is not necessarily a target, more than any other federal cuts at this point, but the issue is that the act has not been reauthorized (it has to be reauthorized every 5 years). It passed through the Senate, it did not pass the House. There was something that caused a pause and it did not go through. That leaves it open and vulnerable. We and the state are watching very closely. We are anticipating that things will be okay, but we are putting in the work to figure out what it could look like.

- 23-24 budget increase had an effect statewide:
 - Facilities receiving weekly coverage increased from 12% to 18%
 - Facilities receiving at least quarterly coverage increased from 53% to 81%
 - Total staff in regional programs increased by 21%
 - Total number of overall facility visits increased by 31%
 - Complaints received by Ombudsmen increased by 60%
- Locally:
 - Facilities receiving routine visits increase from 30% to 90%
 - Went from providing 1 staff training in facilities to 10
 - Resident council work increased from 50 to 100 visits

Dean asked Lyon to describe a routine visit to a facility. Lyon stated that a routine visit is an unscheduled visit for 2 hours once a week. During these visits, ombudsmen meet with as many residents as they can, follow up on open complaints/cases by talking to appropriate residents/staff. Ombudsmen are able to look at charts, etc. (with resident approval).

Lesser asked if Lyon could characterize the kinds of complaints that are coming in. Lyon said the top of the list is always food. Next one is dignity and respect, being talked down to, not being listened to, etc. Improper medications in another one.

f. No old business

g. No new business

Next meeting will be March 24, 2025.

Meeting adjourned 10:45am