



Date: January 10, 2024

To: Chairperson Moses and members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging and Long-Term Care

From: Janet Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator

Re: Support for AB 736 – Establishing a Palliative Care Council

Thank you for this opportunity to share testimony on AB 736. The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR) is a nonprofit agency committed to supporting the successful delivery of aging programs and services in our service area consisting of 70 counties (all but Dane and Milwaukee) and 11 tribes in Wisconsin. We are one of three area agencies on aging (AAAs) in Wisconsin. We provide lead aging agencies in our service area with training, technical assistance, and advocacy to ensure the availability and quality of programs and services to meet the changing needs of older people in Wisconsin. Our mission is to deliver innovative support to lead aging agencies as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older people in Wisconsin.

Palliative care is specialized care focused on the pain, symptoms and stress of serious illness. Though palliative care is a rapidly growing specialty, this type of care aimed at improving the quality of life for both patients and their families, is not available in all parts of the state or across all settings. Though palliative care can be provided in hospitals, nursing homes, outpatient palliative care clinics and other specialized clinics, or at home, finding providers to provide palliative care in the setting the person desires can be challenging, especially if care is desired in their own home.

GWAAR supports AB 736 establishing a palliative care council to evaluate the palliative care system in Wisconsin and make policy recommendations to the state Department of Health Services and the legislature on how to improve it, so that improved quality of life through palliative care can be available to patients with serious illness and their families no matter where they live in the state. This legislation will also help with the development of a palliative care information and education program focused on the general public and health care providers to help increase the awareness of this essential type of care.

While we are strong supporters of efforts to strengthen Wisconsin's palliative care system, we recognize that improving serious illness care requires integration of timely, person-centered serious illness conversations and care planning across all specialties and care settings, including ambulatory, inpatient, and home and community-based care. **To this end, we are advocating for Wisconsin to take a more comprehensive approach by amending this legislation to create a Serious Illness Care Council which broadens the scope and membership of the advisory council to include and represent all specialty areas and interests that serve individuals with serious illness, their families and caregivers** (hospital staff, hospice and palliative care program staff, physicians, nurses, social workers, clergy, counselors, advanced care planning, caregiving agencies and individuals, advocacy organizations, community-based service providers, nursing homes, veterans administration and Veteran Service

Officers, health and social service providers, as well as individuals with serious illness and their family members). Improved access and understanding of each of these areas of care and service is needed for people in need of serious illness care; yet it is not feasible for the state to establish numerous councils. A Serious Illness Care Council would provide a more comprehensive and effective means of supporting the seriously ill and their families, while improving care outcomes.

We appreciate the interest in and efforts of policy makers to improve awareness and access to specialty care addressing the needs of individuals with serious illness and their families. We look forward to continuing to work with you on policies that improve the quality of life of older people in Wisconsin.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations related to AB 736.

Contact:

Janet Zander

Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator, MPA, CSW

Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources

janet.zander@gwaar.org

(608) 228-7253