End of Legislative Session Wrap-Up

Caregiving

Nearly 800,000 family caregivers in Missouri provide over $8 billion worth of services to their loved ones each year. Being a caregiver is often a difficult and thankless job, but AARP Missouri continues to work for needed support for our state’s family caregivers.

The CARE Act

The Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act has now been passed by most state legislatures, including four - Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska, and Illinois – that border Missouri. This year, Senator Ryan Silvey (R-Kansas City) sponsored the CARE Act in SB 1102. The legislation allows a patient being admitted to the hospital to designate a family caregiver who will receive notice of discharge and instructions on home care.

While his bill did not receive a hearing in the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and Health, two House members, Rep. Jeremy LaFaver (D-Kansas City) and Rep. Caleb Jones (R-Columbia) took up the cause and passed the CARE Act as an amendment to another bill in the House.

While the CARE Act made it all the way to conference committee, the language was eventually removed due to conflicts between hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers.

Many Missouri legislators are now educated on the difficulties that family caregivers face when their loved one leaves the hospital and AARP Missouri is confident that there will be great support in the next legislative session.

Click Here to Thank Sen. Silvey for Sponsoring the CARE Act
Click Here to Thank Rep. LaFaver
Click Here to Thank Rep. Jones

Increases to the Asset Limit

Aging, blind, and disabled Missourians who need long term care services through the Medicaid program, known as MO HealthNet, are limited on the amount of personal assets they are allowed to have and still remain eligible for the program. Currently, the levels are $1,000 for an individual and $2,000 for a married couple.

These incredibly low asset levels, in place since 1972, can force people to stay in long term care facilities, even if they no longer need that level of service, simply because they are not allowed to save the money for them to pay to move out.

This year, Representative Kevin Engler (R-Farmington) sponsored House Bill 1565, a bill that raised the asset limit $1,000 per year for individuals and $2,000 per year for married couples, until the asset limit reaches $5,000 and $10,000 respectively. The limit will then continue to rise by the annual increase in the cost of living.

The Asset Limit Increase passed the Missouri General Assembly and is now headed to Governor Jay Nixon for his signature.

Click Here to Thank Rep. Engler for Sponsoring the Asset Limit Increase
Click Here to Urge the Governor to Sign the Asset Limit Increase
End of Session Wrap Up (Caregiving continued)

**Nurse Practitioner Scope of Practice**

Several pieces of legislation were moving this year to increase access to primary care by allowing nurse practitioners to provide services to the full scope of their training and education. There were bills to allow more nurse practitioners – 5 instead of 3 – to collaborate with a single physician and others to remove the arbitrary limit on mileage that a nurse practitioner must be from their collaborating physician while practicing medicine.

While the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed many pieces of legislation that would expand the scope of practice for nurse practitioners, a single senator, Sen. Rob Schaff (R-St. Joseph) stymied the legislation.

AARP Missouri will continue to work with the nurses associations, assisted living organizations and rural health groups to urge greater access to primary care through expanded scope of practice for Missouri nurse practitioners.

**Silver Alert System**

Nothing is more terrifying for a caregiver than when their loved one wanders off. Currently, there is no state-wide system to alert law enforcement, media, and public officials in the immediate area when a vulnerable adult wanders away from their residence.

The Silver Alert System, included in House Bill 1904, sponsored by Rep. Jeanie Lauer (R-Blue Springs) and Senate Bill 1075, sponsored by Sen. Wayne Wallingford (R-Cape Girardeau), would have ensured that appropriate people are notified immediately when a vulnerable adult wanders off, regardless of where they live in Missouri.

The underlying language in HB 1904, which allowed counties to tax cellular telephone services in the same way that landline phones are for 911 emergency services, if approved by voters in that county, faced opposition by several senators who wished to remove their districts from the potential fee.

In the end, HB 1904 failed to pass the Senate in the final week of the legislative session.

**Financial Resilience**

Missourians over age 50 often struggle to save for retirement, or if already retired, live on a fixed income. Building up those savings, to make life a little easier during retirement, and making sure that costs associated with a basic quality of life don’t rise faster than a person’s income are essential to providing for financial security as we age.

**Work and Save**

While no legislation was introduced this session that would allow for increased options for working Missourians to save for retirement, AARP Missouri took the opportunity to meet with not only the sitting State Treasurer, Clint Zweifel, but also candidates who are running for State Treasurer. As a part of our voter engagement over the summer and fall, we will continue to engage the public and the candidates on the need for retirement savings options for working Missourians.

**Utilities**

Throughout the legislative session, several pieces of legislation continued to come up that would increase utility rates on residential customers. Electric rates would increase automatically under a formula rate scheme, water and gas rates through a decoupling measure that would increase rates depending on the weather, and a removal of the cap on the infrastructure surcharge that private natural gas utilities charge.
End of Session Wrap Up
Financial Resilience (continued)

Formula Rates

Before the legislative session even began, rumors of a deal between Noranda Aluminum and Ameren Missouri began to swirl. These two giants, that had been fighting over utility rates for years, were coming together to build a bargain that would provide for their bottom lines, but leave Missouri’s residential customers holding the bill.

The eventual deal that was contained in House Bill 2689 would allow a special rate for Noranda Aluminum and an automatic rate hike for residential customers. As the proponents of the legislation made special deals for more and more businesses, the deal became worse and worse for average Missourians struggling to pay their bills.

AARP Missouri advocates jumped to the defense of their neighbors. Thousands of emails and phone calls flooded senate offices in the last weeks of session, urging senators to consider the rates paid by their constituents. Advertising on social media and radio urged more and more Missourians to take action and contact their legislators.

Gas ISRS

It seems to come back every year, but especially since the acquisition of Missouri Gas Energy, Laclede Gas, now owned by Spire of Alabama, has been pushing for a removal of the cap on the percentage that can be charged to their customers in the infrastructure surcharge.

Again, AARP advocates across the state of Missouri contacted their legislators to urge them to fight back against this blatant attempt to shift the risk of acquisitions onto the backs of Missouri customers.

In the end, a bipartisan and diverse group of senators, including Senator Gary Romine (R-Farmington) and Senator Jill Schupp (D-St. Louis County) literally “stood up” for Missouri consumers, holding the floor of the senate for hours at a time. Every piece of legislation aimed at raising our rates failed to pass.

Thank Sens. Romine and Schupp for standing up for Missouri ratepayers

Voting Rights

For the past 10 years, the Missouri General Assembly has tried a myriad of ways to restrict access to voting by requiring that someone show one of a list of “approved” photo identification cards to be eligible to vote. This year, a measure passed.

Efforts by AARP Advocates and other voting rights groups helped put a minority of senators in the position to negotiate for a less offensive photo identification requirement. Under the new version of House Bill 1631, a voter who does not have an “approved” type of photo identification can still vote a regular ballot as long as they sign a statement saying that they are who they claim to be.

The real concern, however, is the constitutional amendment that was included in House Joint Resolution 53 and will be on either the August or November ballot this year. That language, if approved by the voters, would allow for much more restrictive measures to be passed in the future.