LONG-TERM CARE RESOURCES DATA BANK

House Bill 4342 as introduced
First Analysis (4-23-96)

Sponsor: Rep. Terry London
Committee: Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

According to the Public Policy Institute, a part of the Division of Legislation and Public Policy of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the number of older persons in need of long-term care has been increasing at a rapid rate in recent years. As a result, many states are exploring ways to restructure long-term care systems to increase access to long-term care services, provide for more efficient service delivery, and to cut costs. Long-term care, therefore, no longer refers only to nursing home care, but also includes homes for the aged, adult foster care homes, and a variety of supportive housing models such as assisted living facilities. Adult day care facilities or home health care may be a viable option for some families needing only minimal assistance to care for elderly or disabled relatives at home.

Unfortunately, many states, including Michigan, do not have a single entry access point for long-term care services. Programs and services for the elderly and disabled are offered by a wide array of state, county, and local agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and private-sector providers. Eligibility requirements may differ from county to county, or program to program. This fragmented system can be a logistical nightmare for an elderly or disabled person or their family members to navigate. Additionally, in cases of accidents or sudden incapacitating illness, a family may be in a situation in which decisions about long-term care for a relative must be made quickly and at a time when emotional distress is high.

In response to the growing need of senior citizens to have greater access to information regarding services to the aged, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established the Eldercare Locator in 1991. The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide, directory assistance service designed to help older persons and care givers locate local support resources for aging Americans. The service is easily reached via a toll-free number and can direct a person to a local source that can answer questions. However, since the Eldercare Locator is a nation-wide directory, the information provided is general in nature. Some people feel that in light of the variety of services and programs available, a more detailed resource of long-term care services in Michigan should be provided. Legislation has been proposed along that line to establish a data bank of long-term care resources that would provide easy access to information specific to Michigan services.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Under the Older Michiganians Act, the Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) is required to perform various functions, including, among other things, serving as an advocate for aging and older persons and functioning as the single state agency responsible to supervise and administer the state plan required under the federal Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3001 et al). House Bill 4342 would amend the Older Michiganians Act to require the OSA to establish a state-wide data bank on long-term care resources.

The data bank would have to include, at a minimum, a description of the long-term care services available; the cost of each service; eligibility criteria, if any; financial assistance programs available to defray part or all of the cost of the services; and a description of how to obtain the services. In addition, the OSA would have to provide a toll-free telephone number that state residents could use to obtain information contained in the data bank.

MCL 400.586

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would result in indeterminate costs to the state due to the establishment of a toll-free telephone line, monthly charges for the toll-free line, staff to receive phone calls, staff to compile and maintain resources for the data bank, and computer equipment. Costs would be directly linked to the number of calls made on the toll-free line. (4-16-96)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The Eldercare Locator is a good starting point in identifying local agencies on services to the aged, but the information is not detailed enough. In addition, the elderly are not the only population group to use long-term care services. People seriously injured in accidents or disabled through illness also may be in need of long-term care services, as well as people with mental illness. The establishment of a toll-free hotline that could provide information on the various kinds of long-term care facilities available in the state may actually result in a decrease of associated costs of long-term care, both to individuals and the state, by helping to better match people with the appropriate level of service needed. For instance, a person with a shortened life expectancy but in need of 24-hour care might be better suited for hospice care as opposed to placement in a nursing home. In addition to information on types of services available, the data bank could also provide information on fee schedules for various services, such as nursing home costs compared to assisted living facilities, home health care, or adult foster homes. In a day when consumers are being told to shop wisely, a data bank that can provide information as to services and related costs is long overdue.

For:

According to the Michigan Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, Michigan is one of the few states that does not regulate home health agencies. Reportedly, there is not even a centralized data base that lists the names of existing home health agencies. Further, there are 4,600 licensed adult foster care homes in the state. However, if a person needed a specific setting, such as a wheelchair accessible facility that was air-conditioned, served people in a specific age range, and supplied care specific to the needs of a person with developmental disabilities, there currently would be no way to determine which of the 4,600 adult foster care homes would meet these criteria. The establishment of a data bank that could provide a list of several suitable homes in a person's area would be invaluable. Advocates for the elderly and users of long-term care services agree that anything that would collect available data on long-term care services in one easy to reach data bank should be supported. However, proponents are quick to add that the more detailed the data bank, the better it would serve the needs of the citizens of Michigan.

Against:

At a time when state and federal dollars are at a premium, money should not go to start new programs that may not be needed. People can get the names and phone numbers of local agencies through the Eldercare Locator.

Response:

Though the Eldercare Locator does provide a valuable service, it does not provide information detailed enough to serve the needs of people trying to locate appropriate long-term care services. And, since Michigan does not have a single entry point of access to these services, it can be difficult for a person, especially for the elderly or disabled, to navigate through the existing network of state and local agencies. As to the cost, a detailed information data bank could end up in reduced state Medicaid costs if people could more easily obtain services more appropriate to their level of need.

POSITIONS:

Citizens for Better Care supports the bill. (4-22-96)

The Michigan Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program supports the bill. (4-22-96)

The Office on Services to the Aging has no position on the bill. (4-18-96)