

AARP Wisconsin: Hand-delivers 2,600-plus post cards with names of WI residents who support caregiver bills to top lawmakers

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MADISON, WISCONSIN – AARP Wisconsin today sent a message – literally – to the state’s top legislative leaders that Wisconsin’s nearly 600,000 residents who serve as unpaid family caregivers would benefit from two bills that will help them in their heroic work of caring for loved ones who want to continue living independently in their own homes and communities as long as possible.

Joined by two other organizations who advocate for all Wisconsinites as they age, AARP hand-delivered post cards with the names of more than 2,600 Wisconsinites who support caregiving legislation to the legislative offices of Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and Assembly Minority Leader Gordon Hintz.

More than a dozen red-shirted AARP Wisconsin volunteer advocates were joined by representatives from the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources and the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network in delivering boxes of the post cards to the offices of all four top legislative leaders.

In December, AARP sent postcards to its members in Wisconsin urging them to request public hearings on two bills that would help family caregivers. Those bills include the Credit For Caring Act (AB 126 and SB 126) – which would create a \$500 individual income tax credit for certain expenses incurred by a family caregiver –

and the Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act (AB 584 and SB 516), which would require hospitals to engage with caregivers throughout their stay, and provide them with detailed discharge instructions.

“We delivered over 2,600 of the post cards we received to show lawmakers the breadth of support for these bills across Wisconsin,” said AARP Wisconsin State Advocacy director Helen Marks Dicks.

“Our hope is that with the amount of support shown for these bills, the state’s top legislators will facilitate a hearing and eventually pass this caregiver package. Time is short, but where there is leadership there is always a possibility of success,” Dicks said.

Family caregivers take on huge responsibilities that can be overwhelming, stressful and exhausting. They put in long hours helping loved ones with tasks such as giving baths, dispensing medications, preparing meals, paying bills, and providing transportation to doctor’s appointments. Some even provide higher levels of care, such as wound treatment, dialysis support and feeding tube maintenance.

In Wisconsin alone, family caregivers provide about 538 million hours – valued at about \$7 billion – in unpaid care annually. They spend an average of \$7,000 a year out of their own pockets on costs related to caregiving, and they provide this care while also keeping up with their own jobs, running their own households and trying to make ends meet.

Supporting caregivers is not just a good idea. It also makes good business sense, Dicks explained. By helping them help their own loved ones, they can eliminate or delay the need for more expensive nursing home care and unnecessary hospitalizations – saving countless taxpayer dollars.

“While we often refer to these family caregivers as Wisconsin’s unsung heroes, they are not superheroes,” Dicks said. “They are struggling and could really use our help. It’s high time we step up our game and do more to assist these unsung heroes throughout Wisconsin. We hope lawmakers clearly understand that this tax credit

and the CARE Act are important first steps to providing this critical support.”

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