

Symposium Highlights the Economics of Caregiving

Each year, the President of the United States issues a proclamation declaring November as National Family Caregivers Month. In part, this year's proclamation states, "One of the best measures of a country is how it treats its older citizens and people living with disabilities.



Jon Rubin, Bucks County Director of Human Services, presents a Proclamation to Tam St. Claire, President of Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition.

Every day, caregivers across our country answer this call and lift up the lives of loved ones who need additional support. During National Family Caregivers Month, let us honor their contributions and pledge to continue working toward a future where all caregivers know the same support and understanding they show for those they look after."

This year caregiver's month got a strong kickoff at the symposium, "Who Cares? The Economics of Caregiving," which was held on October 30th, 2015 at Montgomery County Community College. The symposium was presented by the Bucks County Women's Advocacy Coalition (BCWAC), the Bucks County Area Agency on Aging, the Women's Center of Montgomery County, Montgomery County Aging and Adult Services, the Bucks-Mont Collaborative and A Woman's Place. More than 140 individuals were in attendance.

The symposium began with a panel of caregivers moderated by Jen Burnett, the Deputy Secretary for the PA Office of Long Term Living. The caregiver panel set the stage for the day by presenting vivid and candid accounts of how their lives and finances are affected by caregiving.

Gail Gibson Hunt, President and CEO of the National Alliance for Caregiving then presented the keynote address, "The Real Costs of Caregiving." Nearly 44 million Americans are family caregivers, providing services worth approximately \$470 billion in 2013. Ms. Hunt described the impact of caregiving on lost wages and retirement income which amounts to \$327,000 for the average female caregiver; the impact of productivity losses to employers, totaling \$33.6 billion in 2006 for full-time employees who are caregivers, and the fact that the problem is growing as the aging population grows, while the ratio of caregivers available shrinks (the "Caregiving Cliff") over the next 35 years. She also presented some solutions for consideration by

employers, public policy makers and advocates, including paid time off, more flexible scheduling, increased use of relevant technology, and some promising legislation now pending.

A panel of employers presented concerns and solutions from an employers' point of view. Moderated by past Secretary of Aging Brian Duke, the final panel was comprised of legislators addressing public policy issues related to the financial impact of caregiving.

There were a number of officials that showed their support, including former Secretary of Aging, Alma Jacobs, and remarks from David Gingerich, the Deputy Secretary of Aging; Diane Bosak, Deputy Secretary for Workforce Development in the PA Dept. of Labor & Industry; Montgomery County Commissioner Val Arkoosh; and Bucks County Director of Human Services Jon Rubin, who presented a Proclamation from the Bucks County Commissioners.

BCWAC President, Tam St. Claire, wrapped up this very full day, noting that the symposium will be followed by a "white paper" and further advocacy activities on behalf of caregivers in Pennsylvania.

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