

News Release

Task Force aims to reduce isolation among seniors during COVID-19 pandemic *Commissioners, panel of experts to convene and recommend solutions for connecting seniors isolated by pandemic*

May 5, 2020, OAKLAND COUNTY, MI. – The Oakland County Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution sponsored by Commissioner **Kristen Nelson** (D-Waterford Township) to form the Social Connectedness Task Force at its meeting on April 29. The task force has been charged with identifying solutions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among the county's senior population. Social isolation and loneliness have been linked to many physical and mental health problems including heart disease, diabetes, anxiety and depression.

"For many, keeping safe from COVID-19 has come at the cost of social isolation and loneliness," Nelson, who introduced the resolution, said. "Seniors are uniquely vulnerable during these challenging times. We can and should do more to ensure they remain connected to their families, friends, communities, and critical services."

The task force will consist of three commissioners, as well as experts from the community. Nelson serves as the chair of the task force, which also includes Commissioner **Penny Luebs** (D-Clawson) and Commissioner **Eileen T. Kowall** (R-White Lake). In addition, the group will include leaders from other county departments and those from the technology, senior care and education industries.

"Research suggests that isolation and loneliness are main factors in depression, anxiety and other medical symptoms for our senior population," Luebs said. "About one third of all seniors living alone live in poverty and or poor health. We have the ability to help seniors live a good life by decreasing social isolation in today's world. I consider it an honor and duty to help our senior population and value the wisdom and experience each person has to share with our younger population."

The task force will recommend solutions to reduce social isolation to the full Board of Commissioners. Potential solutions may include improving access to and training for the internet and smartphones, improving access to mental health care, screening and wellness visits, enhancing social services, offering distance learning and enrichment opportunities, and increasing public awareness.

“Social isolation among our vulnerable senior population, whose only social contact tends to be outside of the home, has been made worse by the COVID-19 outbreak,” Kowall said. “Now more than ever, it’s crucial that we connect with seniors in Oakland County to minimize their risk for mental and physical health issues related to isolation and loneliness.”

For more information about COVID-19 in Oakland County, visit www.oakgov.com/covid. For health-related questions contact the Health Division’s Nurse on Call at 800-848-5533. For non-medical information, resources, and local community assistance referrals, call the COVID-19 Help Hotline at 248-858-1000.

For more information about the Board of Commissioners, please visit www.oakgov.com/boc or call 248-858-0100.

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