

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC OFFICE ON AGING**



Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of  
Laura Newland  
DC Office on Aging

Before the  
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization  
The Honorable Anita Bonds, Chairperson  
Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building  
Room 500  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

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11:00 A.M.



Good afternoon, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, Committee staff, and members of the community. My name is Laura Newland, and I'm the Executive Director of the DC Office on Aging (DCOA). I am pleased to testify before you today on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2019 (FY2019) Budget.

Last month, Mayor Bowser presented "A Fair Shot," Budget and Financial Plan, the District's 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive balanced budget. This budget does more to make Washington, DC a place where people of all backgrounds and in all stages of life are able to live and thrive by making key investments in infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, public safety, and our seniors. These investments reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at Budget Engagement Forums and, for the first time, a senior telephone town hall to engage directly with our older residents on their priorities for making sure DC continues to be a place they choose to call home.

Madam Chair, when we talk about "A Fair Shot," we are talking about investments in our residents. We are talking about making sure we are a city where no one is left behind, where every voice matters, and where our older residents, people with disabilities, and caregivers are recognized as the keys to keeping our communities strong and vibrant. The Mayor's FY19 budget exemplifies these values in action through continued investments in the programs that are keeping our seniors healthy and engaged, new enhancements to support community living, and significant capital investments that will expand access to wellness and create new citywide wellness programs.



Before I talk about the budget enhancements for FY19, I'd like to highlight the continued investments that are improving and enriching the lives of our older residents, adults with disabilities, and caregivers from Fiscal Year 2018 (FY2018) that will continue in FY 2019. They include:

- Providing more wellness in more places to more seniors with \$350,000 invested in the citywide Senior Fit & Well program;
- Combatting social isolation with \$459,000 to provide transportation to Senior Wellness Centers and adult day health centers for residents most at risk of isolation;
- Supporting the community with \$300,000 committed to neighbors serving neighbors through senior villages; and
- Ensuring more residents with Alzheimer's and other related dementias can live longer and safer in the community with a \$500,000 annual investment.

Madam Chair, a commitment that I made to you when I was first appointed to this role was to always listen and ensure that our residents were driving the conversation around what is needed to age well in this city. This continues to be a core value for us—and not just when decisions need to be made, but every day. Listening is a simple act with profound results and what the community tells us is changing the way we serve our residents.

**Create more safe spaces for LGBTQ seniors:** We heard that we needed to do more to meet the needs of older LGBTQ residents. Last year, we organized an Advisory Committee made up of older LGBTQ residents, service providers, and advocates to develop recommendations to the Office on Aging. We wanted to make sure that new programming for LGBTQ seniors would be



a success, and we knew that the best chance for success would be to have the community play a key role in identifying programmatic opportunities for DCOA to develop. Thanks to this collective effort, we will be one of a few jurisdictions nationwide providing LGBTQ-specific programming beyond a community dining site. This year, we are launching a citywide meal and entertainment social program for older LGBTQ adults, creating peer-led support groups throughout the city, sponsoring an LGBTQ senior PRIDE event, and developing a community-driven curriculum on cultural competency throughout our network, starting with our DCOA staff and Senior Service Network (SSN) social workers this year.

**Improve the customer calling experience:** At our last hearing, we heard about challenges in connecting with DCOA by phone. Since then, we've been working to improve the customer experience and making sure that anyone and everyone who called us would speak to a live person within 24 hours or the next business day. We have overhauled our information line and reduced the wait time down to one minute and 45 seconds on average. We are answering 2,426 calls a month—a 37 percent increase from the total number of calls answered in the first quarter of the year—and 100 percent of our callers are speaking with someone within 24 hours, or the next business day if they leave a message.

**Provide more emotional support:** Participants at our Senior Wellness Centers have built meaningful connections with each other. They've shared their life experiences, celebrated retirements, welcomed grandkids, and started new chapters in their lives. They've also grieved together and supported each other during difficult times. We are fortunate to provide these venues where tight bonds can be formed, but we've heard that we needed to do more to support



participants' emotional health, particularly during the tough times. So in FY18, we are launching a new hope-based counseling pilot program to better address the needs of seniors who may be experiencing grief and to build a network of support.

**Increase access to wellness programs in wards without a Senior Wellness Center:** We also heard from residents about the need for more access to wellness programs and services, particularly in wards that do not have a brick-and-mortar wellness site. This fiscal year, we are working with the community to pilot a satellite senior wellness model in Wards 2 and 3, using community spaces to deliver the same high-quality programs found in our Senior Wellness Centers, and connecting residents to the programming that currently exists. Madam Chair, we are focused on making sure all of our older Washingtonians have access to high-quality programs and services, no matter where they live. This pilot program will be designed by the community and for the community. We are committed to seeing the Satellite Wellness Center concept come to life this year and building on its success in the future.

Madam Chair, I'd like to now talk about some of the enhancements for FY19 and how these investments will enable the agency to support community living, promote wellness, provide care for caregivers, and create new models of wellness across the city.

**Support Community Living:** Thanks to the Mayor's new \$4.5 million investment into our Safe at Home program in FY19, we'll help more of our older residents continue living in the homes and communities they know and love. According to our 2016 Senior Needs Assessment, the top concern among older adults in the District is the fear of falling. The Safe at Home program is



making the homes and communities of our older residents and adults with disabilities safer through preventative in-home adaptations and exterior security cameras. Since we launched this program in January 2016, we've completed more than 1,200 projects, from installing grab bars, to safety railings, stair lifts, to bath tub cut outs. With this increased investment, we anticipate installing in-home safety adaptations in the homes of up to 700 additional seniors, and up to 500 security cameras. Madam Chair, the Safe at Home program has been so successful, we have more and more of our residents wanting to participate. We've heard that we need to provide more opportunity for residents who are just above the income threshold to access this program. I'm pleased to report that in FY19, we will be adding a cost-sharing component to accommodate residents who make up to 100 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI).

**Promote Wellness:** Access to health, wellness, socialization, and recreation are a top priority for the Administration. In FY19, the Mayor is investing \$1.5 million to expand two of our Senior Wellness Centers—Model Cities and Congress Heights. This is in addition to the \$4 million capital investments made this fiscal year to go toward interior refreshes, equipment and accessibility upgrades across our Senior Wellness Centers. We are working with the Department of General Services to scope the projects and will be meeting with the Model Cities and Congress Heights participants to discuss the plans for expansion in the coming months.

**Eat Well, Live Better:** We'll also be investing in a new senior-driven project that is focused on sustainability and holistic health. Thanks to the Mayor's \$11.4 million capital investment, we are working on plans for a new citywide site, located in Ward 8, centered on eating well and living better. We are excited about this concept and the opportunity to have our older residents drive



the programming at the site. The project will begin in 2022 with anticipated completion in 2023. Based on community feedback, we aim to include a commercial kitchen, classrooms, rooftop and indoor hydroponic gardens, and programming created by and for seniors. We are committed to working with a grantee who will ensure that 100percent of the frontline staff and 50 percent of operations staff for the new site will be District residents, age 60 and older.

**Care for Caregiver:** Madam Chair, at some point in our lives, we will all be touched by caregiving, whether we are the caregiver or the recipient. Here in DC, we're committed to caring for our caregivers, because they are often the invisible heroes—keeping our communities vibrant and strong, but spending little time taking care of themselves. And chances are we could all benefit from more caregiver resources and supports. Thanks to the Mayor's support and our strong partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), in FY19 we are partnering on plans to create a state-of-the-art caregiver complex with a \$35 million capital investment toward rebuilding the therapeutic recreation site in Ward 7. Construction will begin in FY2020 with a planned opening in FY2022. This new complex will provide therapeutic, respite, and support services all under one roof for the unpaid and family caregivers in the District.

Because we know that to age well is to live well, the Administration is committed to ensuring our older residents have access to the programs and supports to keep them thriving in their community. This is why more and more of our older residents choose to continue to call the District home—because we have a Mayor who knows that investments in our older residents, adults with disabilities, and caregivers are investments in our communities. Thanks to the



Mayor's guidance and your support, we are able to truly say that DC is the best city in the world to age! I look forward to our continued work together to achieve our shared goals and give all residents a fair shot to benefit from Washington, DC's continued prosperity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.

