



**Testimony Submitted for the DC Office on Aging Performance Oversight Hearing  
Before the DC Council Committee on Housing and Community Development  
Chairperson Anita Bonds  
February 12, 2015**

Paula Reichel, DC Regional Director  
[preichel@capitalareafoodbank.org](mailto:preichel@capitalareafoodbank.org), 202-644-9827

Good afternoon Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee. My name is Paula Reichel and I am the DC Regional Director at the Capital Area Food Bank. The Capital Area Food Bank is the largest hunger relief organization in the DC region, reaching over 540,000 individuals at risk of hunger through direct service and a network of more than 500 non-profit partner agencies. The food bank has administered the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) as a grantee with the DC Office on Aging since 2012 and is a proud member of the DC Senior Advisory Coalition.

A recent Washington Post article brought to light the critical issue of senior hunger in the District of Columbia and some of the challenges associated with providing meals to seniors through the DC Office on Aging's congregate and home-delivered meal programs. 15% of seniors in DC live in poverty, the highest rate in the country. One consequence of poverty is food insecurity. Food insecurity has particularly severe implications for senior health, increasing the likelihood of chronic and acute disease while reducing overall quality of life.

As the administrator of CSFP, communal, and home-delivered meal service, the DC Office on Aging is well-positioned to provide the leadership necessary to drive a coordinated approach to addressing senior hunger, but as of yet has not taken all of the steps necessary to do so.

- Participation information is not shared across programs. This limits DCOA and its grantees ability to understand community reach, to identify and fill service gaps, and to allocate resources effectively.
- Nutrition services are not effectively cross promoted. Most community distribution sites do not provide resources about or referrals to other sites and very few sites operate more than one nutrition program.
- Certain program elements like nutrition education and homebound classification are not coordinated across grantees and could benefit from standardization.

Additionally, as a part of a broader strategy to address senior hunger, we encourage DCOA to identify ways to provide transportation services to food insecure seniors. Although CSFP is primarily distributed through senior residences and other community distribution sites open once monthly, it also operates two walk-in centers which are open daily. In 2014, the food bank surveyed participants at its walk-in centers about their transportation needs and found that 20% were paying \$5 or more per month to pick up their supplemental groceries. Our request to initiate a pilot program with Seabury Connector was denied as a result of the Connector being at capacity meeting existing requests for medical appointments.

While we feel strongly that DCOA should do more to create cohesion among its nutrition services, we have been encouraged by certain actions taken by the DCOA over the last year to better integrate nutrition services into its overall programming, to increase access to fresh produce, and to raise awareness around senior hunger.

- The ADRC universal intake form supports referrals being made to multiple senior nutrition programs, including CSFP and SNAP, and a vacancy has been filled to provide application assistance for Medicaid and SNAP within the ADRC.
- In response to strong demand for fresh produce, DCOA supported the Capital Area Food Bank in incorporating fresh fruits and vegetables into its CSFP walk-in center distributions and fresh produce is now accessible at certain congregate meal sites through salad bars.
- DCOA has spotlighted senior hunger in several external communications and acknowledges its partners in its communication efforts.

We hope that DCOA continues to recognize the importance of senior hunger in the District and takes leadership in guiding its grantees toward better, more coordinated service delivery.