

District of Columbia Office on Aging Performance Oversight
Before the District of Columbia City Council
Committee on Housing and Community Development - Chairperson Anita Bonds
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Good morning Chairperson Bonds and Committee members. My name is Marla Lahat and I am Executive Director of Home Care Partners. Home Care Partners is a proud member of the D.C. Senior Advisory Coalition and the D.C. Coalition on Long Term Care. We are also one of the largest agencies within the DC Office on Aging's Senior Service Network. For almost 60 years, Home Care Partners has provided supportive home care services through the use of certified home care aides who provide assistance with personal care, light housekeeping, meal preparation and shopping. Our home care clients, who often can thrive with only six to twelve hours of service per week have low to moderate incomes but do not qualify for Medicaid. Our clients also do not have the financial means to pay privately for the home care assistance they need to help them remain safely in their own homes and avoid more costly nursing home placement. The choice is obvious: DC nursing home costs can top \$100,000/ year while Home Care Partners costs for the average client total only about \$10,000/ year. Of course, cost is only one of the many reasons that Seniors prefer to remain in their own homes.

I am pleased to be here today to offer brief comments about the performance of the DC Office on Aging during the last year. I wish to commend Executive Director, Dr John Thompson, and his staff. During the last few years, the staff of DCOA has grown, not only in size, but also in caliber. At present, I believe DCOA has one of the most talented group of staff to be found anywhere within the D.C. government. I believe that Dr. Thompson and his staff have recognized that in order to be responsive to the needs of Seniors, they also must be responsive to the needs of the nonprofit agencies that make up the Senior Service Network that deliver many of the services that Seniors need and desire.

To that end, Home Care Partners was extremely grateful to receive a significant increase in our FY 15 grant award. This increase will help more Seniors to receive needed home care aide services while also enabling our current clients to receive more hours of service to meet their increasing needs as they age. It also allows Seniors who may be waiting for more intensive home care through the Medicaid waiver to receive interim home care support from Home Care Partners while their waiver applications are in process. We cannot express our appreciation enough for the foresight that the Council showed in increasing the funding to DCOA and to DCOA for placing a priority on meeting the home care needs of these most frail elders.

I believe that DCOA has taken many excellent steps toward increasing their responsiveness to the community during the past year. However, there is one critical initiative that was begun in 2014 but has yet to be implemented: the need to increase reimbursement rates for the grantee agencies. The reimbursement rates have not changed in at least 3 years while expenses for the nonprofit partners in the Senior Service Network continue to rise. During this same time period, the living wage in D.C. rose three times from \$12.50/ hour to \$13.80/ hour. For an agency like Home Care Partners, with over 100 D.C. home care aides who are directly impacted by the living wage, these increases affect our costs significantly. I commend DCOA for commissioning an actuarial study last summer to study this issue. Although I believe DCOA is anxious to compensate their nonprofit network partners fairly, the actuaries' recommendations for increased reimbursement rates have not yet been implemented. I sincerely hope that the approval and implementation process for these improved and more representative reimbursement rates can be expedited in FY 15.

In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the D.C. Office on Aging and to the Council for supporting D.C.'s efforts to truly become an "Age Friendly City". Thank you.