

Testimony on District of Columbia Office on Aging Oversight
Before the District of Columbia City Council
Committee on Housing and Community Development
Chairperson Anita Bonds
April 23, 2015

Presented by
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Good morning Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee on Housing and Community Development. My name is Tori Goldhammer. I am an occupational therapist, founder of the DC Falls Free Coalition and the Coordinator of the DC Senior Advisory Coalition.

Over the past four years I have worked closely with Dr. Thompson and his staff at the Office on Aging. I appreciate their support on programming and their willingness to consider new ideas. The increased budget over the past few years has contributed to an increase in vital services for community dwelling older adults. These services help those that are able remain in their homes and communities while also saving the District money for nursing home care.

However, the demands for these services continue to increase as the percentage of seniors in the District increases. The DC Senior Advisory Coalition surveyed our members to determine needs that are not being met within the current budget. The information was compiled and we created a document requesting an additional \$2.8 million over the FY 15 budget amount. We have provided the full document for details but to highlight some of the needs:

Transportation. As you know, the Seabury Connector provides vital transportation to and from medical appointments, adult day health care programs and more at no cost to the consumer. It should be noted that the use of the Connector actually saves the District \$14 per ride vs. use of Metro Access. The Connector has been so well received in the District that it is now unable to meet demand. At this time the Connector can only service one shift, in the earlier part of the day. This creates difficulty for seniors who have medical appointments later in the day. Additionally, this single shift is not enough to meet demand and Seabury regularly is unable to fill all ride requests. By adding an additional 10 drivers, they can meet up to 2000 more service requests per month, doubling their current capacity. The cost for one driver is ~\$46,000 therefore an additional **\$460,000** will help meet current demand and allow for flexible scheduling for improved overall service.

Nutrition. According to the most recent information provided to us by the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, the percentage of seniors who face the threat of hunger in DC has climbed from 15.2% in 2012 to 20.3% in 2013 (the most recent year for data) representing a 33% increase in senior hunger concerns. Combatting senior hunger requires coordination among many agencies, however there are services provided by DCOA that can help. The Home Delivered Meals program has seen an increase in supply and demand over the past few years. While we understand the budget cannot be increased for this program, we would like to see the

lead agencies that deliver the meals have autonomy over managing their slots so that they can prioritize the neediest seniors and fill slots as they become available. Additionally, the lead agencies require more nutritionists to provide essential nutrition counseling, especially in the home. Across the network, 3 additional nutritionists would be able to provide services to 300 high risk seniors for a cost of **\$150,000**.

Wellness Centers. The proposed FY 16 budget cuts funding to the Wellness Centers by \$1 million. While we understand the need to find savings and utilize resources wisely, we are concerned that core programming will also be affected. Many of the centers we surveyed reported using some of the funds allotted for the extended hours to also increase core program services and staff. Therefore we request that this cut be examined closely to ensure it will not affect weekday/daytime services that the community based seniors count on for socialization and exercise.

These highlight just a few of the needs our coalition identified. We understand the agencies were required to look at all programs in order to manage a predicted deficit. However since the Office on Aging budget represents less than one half of one percent of the overall District budget we are concerned that any decrease will affect vital services that older adults need and deserve.

In closing I would like to quote from two District seniors who prepared testimony for today's hearing but are unable to present orally:

Ms. K states "I've gotten more information and help from going to senior centers than government agencies. They are also good social living for us. Plus they have meals, use of computers, exercise and yoga classes. Help those who love to get out and vote for you."

Ms. D states: "Many of the elderly folk here in the city have lived here a lifetime, paid their taxes, maintained their homes and served their communities in many positive ways. These people deserve to have food delivered to them or made available through subsidized food services. Don't take away this one very essential need by cutting back the current services but rather increase the budget to meet the increasing need. **Let's avoid considering the elderly as a "problem". We are people who deserve respect and have given and continue to contribute to our society. We are important. Please don't sell us short.**"

I have attached their testimonies as well.

Thank you for your consideration.