

Testimony on Department of Housing and Community Development Oversight

Before the District of Columbia City Council

Committee on Housing and Community Development

Chairperson Anita Bonds

April 20, 2015

Presented by Tori Goldhammer, Occupational Therapist

Coordinator DC Senior Advisory Coalition

Founder of DC Falls Free Coalition

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.

As an occupational therapist, I work with older adults throughout the District to help them identify modifications to remain safely in their home as they age. My services are typically covered by Medicare, so I am able to see residents of all income levels. The majority of seniors I see require simple modifications to prevent falls and improve accessibility in their homes. As you know the housing stock in the District is old and difficult to manage with a physical impairment. The seniors I work with face obstacles such as interior and exterior stairs and small bathrooms with tubs. However, there are often modifications that can help overcome these barriers and facilitate aging in place.

Through two existing District funded programs we have data regarding the average cost of recommended home modifications for accessibility and safety. For the months between June 2014 and April 2015, the Money Follows the Person project at the Department of Health Care Finance has provided home modifications for 17 individuals transitioning out of nursing homes. These modifications totaled \$63,000 with an average cost of \$3700 per individual. Beginning February 2015, the DC Office on Aging funded a program to perform in home fall risk assessments. Eleven of the fifteen homes assessed between February and March required simple modifications, with total cost of \$32,000 and an average of \$2900 per home. Unfortunately most of these homeowners are unable to fund the

modifications on their own and therefore will not be able to implement the changes.

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has a program that can assist with these modifications. Under the Single Family Residential Rehabilitation Program (SFRRP) the Handicapped Accessibility Improvement Program (HAIP) is a grant of up to \$30,000 available for accessibility modifications. It is a generous program that can more than cover the needs of the seniors in need of the modifications and it is well funded by the Mayor and Council. However, because it is housed under the larger SFRRP it can be difficult to access and can take a significant amount of time to go from application to completion of work. This delay prevents important safety modifications from being installed in a timely manner and leaves the senior at risk for falling.

DHCD is aware of the issues with the program and they have been very open to working with a task force of stakeholders in the community to improve the process. While I greatly appreciate their efforts, I do not believe fixing the larger SFRRP is going to help the people I work with who only need accessibility modifications. The process is still time consuming for the individual and will delay important modifications that many times should be installed immediately.

I respectfully request a new program be created in DHCD that is designed specifically for accessibility modifications. This program can have a maximum of a \$10,000 grant which should suffice to modify staircases and entrances, which are the greatest barrier for the seniors. This program should not require extra funding as DHCD has a generous budget for the SFRRP. Unfortunately for FY 16 the budget for the program has a significant decrease in funding but DHCD has assured us they will be able to meet demand under the proposed budget.

Therefore, I request only your support for the new program.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Tori Goldhammer*

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