

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Aging and Community Living



**Fiscal Year 2019-2020
Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of
Laura Newland
Director

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

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

Tuesday, February 25, 2020
10:00 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds, committee members, and staff. I am Laura Newland, Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL). On behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today to testify on the Department's accomplishments during Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020, to date.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Mayor Bowser for her strong leadership and for constantly challenging us to think bigger and bolder to make DC a city where our older residents, adults with disabilities, and caregivers can thrive. I'd also like to recognize my dedicated team of more than 100 staff who are committed to making sure that the work we do within the agency is always reflective of the community we serve. Joining me at the table is DAAC's Chief of Staff, Garret King.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2019 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. We continue that effort as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity, especially our older adults, adults with disabilities, and caregivers.

The mission of the Department of Aging and Community Living is to advocate, plan, implement, and monitor programs in health, education, and social services for the elderly; promote longevity, independence, dignity, and choice for aged District residents, District residents with disabilities regardless of age, and caregivers; ensure the rights of older adults and their families and prevent



their abuse, neglect, and exploitation; uphold the core values of service excellence, respect, compassion, integrity, and accountability; and lead efforts to strengthen service delivery and capacity by engaging community stakeholders and partners to leverage resources.

Just over a year ago, Mayor Bowser officially designated the Office on Aging as the Department of Aging and Community Living, fulfilling the vision of our former Mayor Marion Barry. Madam Chair, I want to thank you for introducing the legislation that got us to where we are today. Since then, we got to work on creating a new brand that reflects our community, our commitment to service, and our vision for our newly named agency. We're especially proud of our new logo because seniors from all eight wards helped us choose it through a voting process. The logo you see today and our new tagline—Live Boldly!—won by a landslide! With our new identity, we had the opportunity to turn our attention inward and develop a vision that represented our agency. I'd like to share with you our vision and values statement that we developed during this process and how we've applied these values to the work we've done, and continue to do, for the community.

We believe in the power of **good government** to transform our lives at every age and ability.

We believe every individual is needed to create **strong communities** that support, inspire, and love.

We believe in the power of community to allow all of us at every age and ability to **live boldly!**



Madam Chair, I'm pleased to share with you today how our vision drives our actions and will continue to serve as the core of how we operate this year and into the future.

We believe in the power of good government to transform our lives at every age and ability.

When we say good government, we are talking about a government that is inclusive, responsive, driven by the community, and there for our community at every age, stage, and ability. As you've said to me, people just want a government to support them as they live their lives—and that's why we're here. Thanks to our Mayor, DACL is now an agency that can be there for you when times are great, and when times are not so great. In October 2019, we officially welcomed Adult Protective Services (APS) to our agency. This move will enable us to provide a stronger continuum of services—from initial crisis, to stabilization, and to connection to programs to help people thrive in the community. APS is integrating with our grantee network and our larger portfolio of direct services to create a more seamless customer service experience across all of our programs. We are focused on building a responsive, integrated, and adaptive system of support for our residents so we can better meet our residents, wherever they are at.

Good government also means that we are constantly looking at the quality of our services and asking ourselves, "how can we make this experience better for our residents?" We continue to focus on creating equity, consistency, and clarity around all of our programs and services, whether DACL provides the services directly, or funds the services through our network of more than 20 community-based organizations. In FY19, we worked with our network of grantees to update and make improvements to our service standards for assessment, case management, and counseling—services provided in all eight wards of the city. We want to make sure that residents are receiving



the same high-quality service, no matter where they live in the District. Madam Chair, we all know how frustrating it is to have to tell your story over and over again as you are passed around to different teams and different organizations. So, DACL worked with project managers and social workers from our grantee organizations to revise our network-wide service standards and provide a more seamless coordination of care for our clients. Through this effort, we are working towards making it easier for residents to get the support they need, when and where they need it.

Good government also means that we're willing to try new things. Last year, I mentioned that after feedback from the community, DACL would launch a pilot program to bring wellness activities to various locations throughout Wards 2 and 3, where there is no brick-and-mortar senior wellness center. In FY19, DACL was pleased to fund a satellite wellness program, called Around Town, to coordinate all the activities for seniors in locations throughout the wards, including libraries, recreation centers, churches, museums, and senior buildings. In its first year, this program has served 444 residents—365 of whom were interacting with DACL for the first time.

By investing in great ideas, constantly looking for ways we can improve and make it easier for residents to connect to services they need, we are better able to create and deliver the programs that can transform lives here in the District.

We believe every individual is needed to create strong communities that support, inspire, and love.

Our role as government is to support the community. One of the ways we are doing this is by creating strong connections across generations and neighborhoods. Our annual Cupid's Kids



campaign has grown significantly with each year. Madam Chair, we started this initiative in 2017 to provide an opportunity for DCPS students to create personal Valentine's Day cards for homebound seniors. The students are able to use it as a learning opportunity about the important role of every generation in their communities. We started this program with a dozen schools. I'm proud to report that this fiscal year, 25 DC Public Schools and Charter Schools from all eight wards participated—nearly double the number of schools from last year! Our seniors are taking notice too. We've heard from seniors that they'd like to see more volunteer opportunities and more connections with DCPS students. So, we'll be engaging with DCPS this year to look for ways to build these stronger intergenerational ties for our students and our seniors—something I know you've been supportive of for quite some time. I want to thank all of the administrators and teachers who are helping DACL foster these connections and instilling our DC Values in our youngest generation. And of course, I want to thank the students. Through your poems, your artwork, and your kind messages you are demonstrating love in action.

When we say that every individual is needed to create strong communities, we mean every *single* District resident. I've mentioned to you in the past that DACL formed a partnership with the DC Department of Corrections to connect soon-to-be-returning citizens to programs that could help ensure a smoother transition back into their communities—where they need to be. In FY19, DACL partnered with the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens Affairs to travel to out-of-state federal prisons to meet with incarcerated older District residents and provide valuable information and links to the many programs that would help them transition back into their own communities, here in the District. Through this partnership, DACL has traveled to West Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey and reached more than 300 District residents, providing tools, resources, and most of all,



hope. Madam Chair, my team completes more than 200 outreach events a year, but as you can see, these activities are more than just numbers. When our actions are driven by a vision to connect with every individual, no matter their circumstance, we are helping to instill a sense of community that defies physical boundaries, and when they return to their community in DC, DACL will be here for them.

At the last Senior Holiday Celebration, Mayor Bowser challenged all of our seniors to reach out to three of their neighbors who were not at the celebration and bring them to our next event, help them get connected to their community, and to DACL programs. Madam Chair, we know that it's critical that we are reaching those in the community who may be isolated, but we need the support of our entire community. So, I want to reiterate the message from the Mayor. It takes all of us to make sure that, here in DC, no one is left behind.

We believe in the power of community to allow all of us at every age and ability to live boldly!

The reason we talk so much about community is because the strength of our community is what makes DC the best city in the world to age! Community means supporting your neighbors through difficult times, sharing a laugh through the good times, advocating for those who may not be able to speak for themselves, and telling us, as a government, what's needed to ensure every resident, at every age and ability can live boldly in DC.

A few years ago, the community told us that we needed to do more to support our older LGBTQ residents, who are twice as likely to live alone and face isolation. Since then, we worked with the community to gather feedback and make recommendations on programming that our community



wanted to see. Today, we are funding five community partners to deliver high-quality programs to engage our LGBTQ seniors and provide safer spaces across the District. Programs such as peer-led support groups, intergenerational mentoring, social activities, conversations, and entertainment around a meal, are making it easier for LGBTQ seniors to find connection and support in an affirming environment. We heard the feedback, we asked for ideas, we listened, and then we turned those ideas into action. Thanks to this work, DC joins New York and San Francisco in providing government funding for programs specifically designed for LGBTQ seniors. We know that our work is far from over, but thanks to our community, we continue to listen, to learn, and to look for ways that we can work together to solve some of our most pressing challenges.

Madam Chair, in FY19, with our new name, we've been able to transform the look of our agency, create a common vision, build lasting bonds with the community we serve, and create a more seamless customer experience. As you know, our work continues. We're looking forward to engaging residents in all eight wards of the city in the development of our 10-Year Strategic Plan and making sure that the programs and services across District government reflect the experiences of our older residents today and tomorrow. Thanks to the Mayor's leadership and your support, I think we can proudly say that here in DC you don't lose relevance with every passing birthday. In fact, here in DC, we are all working together, from our Mayor to our Councilmembers, our youngest generations to our oldest, our District government agencies to our community-based non-profits, and our neighbors to our commissioners, to make sure that DC is place where we can all live boldly no matter our age, stage, or ability.

