

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



Fiscal Year 2021-2022
Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Committee on Housing & Executive Administration
The Honorable Anita Bonds, Chairperson

Tuesday, June 22, 2021
9:30 AM

Good afternoon, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Housing and Executive Administration staff, and members of the community. My name is Laura Newland, and I'm the Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL). I'm pleased to testify today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser to discuss the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) budget for the agency. Before I get started, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible leadership of Mayor Bowser who has led DC through unprecedented challenges.

Last month, Mayor Muriel Bowser presented her Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Budget and Financial Plan to the Council – a budget that is guided by equity. The Mayor's budget is committed to investing in what we know will be the pillars of equitable recovery from the financial impacts we all felt from the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2022 Fair Shot Budget is one that honors the sacrifices of our residents during COVID-19 by setting our community up for a strong economic recovery and a strong recovery of our community's physical and mental health.

Our response over the past 15 months has been unprecedented, and we have much to be proud of. DACL staff have shown over and over their dedication, adaptability, and creativity, and our grant and contract partners have partnered with us as we've had to quickly meet the changing needs of our community. Together, we've:

- Delivered more than 2 million meals to more than 6,600 older adults since the start of the Public Health Emergency.
- Launched a senior tech program, connecting 500 qualifying older district residents
- Launched a Call & Talk line engaging nearly 100 residents with friendly calls and conversations.



- Hosted two Virtual Mayor’s Annual Senior Symposiums on Channel 16, which included special meal deliveries.
- Hosted the first ever Virtual Ms. Senior DC, which will air on June 27th on Channel 16-- so please tune in and find out who is crowned our 2021 Ms. Senior DC to represent us on the national stage in October!

Madam Chair, a year ago, we had no idea when we’d get back to seeing each other again in person. We’ve spent the last 15 months working from home as much as possible, social distancing, all the while encouraging our community to do the same. What we thought would be a month of really tough sacrifices, continued to drag on and slowly became our new normal. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us in ways that are difficult to fully grasp. Perhaps the most urgent lesson for all is that we need each other. We are not meant to live in isolation.

When we talk about equitable recovery, we’re talking about building back stronger—and doing it together. Creating stronger community bonds, more ties with each other, and creating a system that is built for all who need us when they need us. While the past 15 months have been incredibly challenging, I can’t help but feel optimistic for what’s in store for us as we move forward. Together.

I’d like to share a brief presentation to tell you more about some of the ways we’re responding to the Mayor’s charge to build back better and stronger in the upcoming fiscal year.

[Begin slide presentation]



Three Key Changes for FY22

In FY2022, DACL will be centralizing some of our core services. This includes case management, intake, and assessment. We'll also be using a multidisciplinary approach to serve more complex needs, at the front door. And thanks to the Mayor's FY22 investments, we'll be working closely with our grantee partners to create neighborhood-based socialization hubs to help combat senior isolation and senior hunger. We've heard a lot of testimony today about how important meeting the needs of our seniors is—I couldn't agree more. We are making these changes **because** we want to make sure seniors don't fall through the cracks.

Current Case Management Referral Process

By bringing these services into the agency, we're focused on creating a system that is easier to access for all District residents. Currently, a resident can call us at 202-724-5626, and if they require case management support, we will refer them out to one of our lead agencies, depending on their ward. When the referral is received, the lead agency will conduct their initial intake, which is specific to each agency. If the referral is urgent, the grantee should call the client within 24 hours or the next business day. If it's not urgent, the grantee should follow up within five working days of receipt of the referral--if staff are available. If staff are not available, the client will be placed on a waitlist until a staff member is available to follow up. When a staff member is available, the client will go through another intake to determine whether case management is an appropriate service. If so, the grantee will conduct a comprehensive assessment. Then, the grantee will develop a plan of care, the timing and content of which is also specific to each grantee. When the client begins to receive case management, the level of service



and type of support will be determined by the grantee that is operating in his or her ward. Each of these agencies have their own specific intake process and their own specific case management service. The system, although it was created many years ago with the best of intentions, is quite complex and residents may wait up to 30 days from the time of their first call to being enrolled in the service.

New Proposed Referral Process

When we talk about centralizing this model, we mean bringing in these core services to operate within DACL and removing some of this complexity. I think we can all agree that an ideal customer service model is one where a client will call one number and our staff will either resolve the issue immediately through providing information directly, referring urgent matters of potential abuse, neglect, or exploitation directly to our Adult Protective Services unit, or assigning complex matters to a multi-disciplinary team for more in-depth follow up.

Whether a client is calling for connection to social activities, or for more complex needs that require a multidisciplinary team approach, we're simplifying the system, shortening wait times, minimizing the need to wait for a returned call, and providing the best quality of customer service the moment a resident enters our system. Our staff will work with each client to determine the best options and how to achieve their goals. Depending on need, residents will have access to a team that may include social workers, nutritionists, and Medicaid specialists working to provide the necessary supports. We're creating a more streamlined system and a stronger continuum of services for our residents—where one call will open the door to a comprehensive network of programs and supports across the District.



FY22 Budget Enhancements

Let me be very clear. DACL's FY22 budget is about doing better **and doing more.** The Mayor has added \$4.5M in enhancements to DACL's FY22 budget, so let me describe how those funds will be used.

In FY22, the Mayor is investing \$2.5 million in neighborhood-based socialization hubs to reach more seniors and combat senior isolation and senior hunger in all eight wards. As DACL centralizes core services to create more equity, consistency, and quality, we're asking our lead agencies to develop new and innovative senior programming that reflects the needs and asks from the communities they serve. Programs might include opportunities for: peer-to-peer learning, senior employment and volunteerism, and intergenerational connections. This community-driven, hyper-local model of engagement will focus on reaching more seniors and strengthening community throughout the city.

Again, our lead agencies will have the opportunity to keep their current grant funding levels if they choose to partner with us in meeting the urgent challenges we face in combatting senior isolation and senior hunger. We value our relationships with our community-based partners and believe they're particularly well positioned to build and strengthen community bonds, which we have all seen are so critical.

The Mayor is also adding \$500,000 for senior villages to expand innovative programming and provide technical assistance to modify the membership-based village model for low-income neighborhoods. What we've seen over the past 15 months is that the neighbor-to-



neighbor connection is critical to creating resilient communities where our older residents can thrive.

In FY22, the Mayor is also growing our ConnectorCard program by \$1M. This program provides a cost-share debit card based on a sliding scale for qualifying seniors to use on transportation of their choice to get to and from any destination in the city, whether through Metro, including MetroAccess, cabs, or rideshare services. This \$1M enhancement will allow us to provide transportation flexibility and choice to around 1,000 more seniors.

Finally, we've consistently heard from seniors during this past year and a half that they've really enjoyed virtual programming, so the Mayor has invested \$500,000 to develop and grow citywide virtual wellness programs in FY22.

Equity, Consistency, Quality

In FY2022, thanks to the Mayor's investments, we have an opportunity to create a stronger, more responsive system of support for our residents that strengthens community bonds, provides ease of access, uses a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach at the front door, and responds to the most up-to-date science on loneliness, and social isolation. This is an opportunity to provide the broadest array of senior programs than we have ever provided in this city's history. I'm looking forward to working with our grantee partners, the community, and you, Madam Chair, to see all that we can accomplish. Together.

[End slide presentation]

Conclusion



Madam Chair, the Mayor is committed to an equitable recovery and building back stronger and better for all District residents. For DACL, this means a robust system of services and supports that are easy to access, consistent no matter who you are or where you live, and of high quality. I'm so proud of the way our agency and network has responded to the pandemic and how we're working together towards what's next for our residents. And I'm excited that the Mayor has committed to continued investments in our community-based organizations so that they can do the important work of meeting more seniors where they are as we continue to recover from the pandemic. Thanks to the leadership from our Mayor and your support, we continue to prove that DC is truly the best city in the world to age! Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.

