

Government of the District of Columbia
Department of Aging and Community Living



**Fiscal Year 2025-2026
Budget Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Committee on Executive Administration and Labor
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Anita Bonds, Chairperson

Monday, June 16, 2025

2:30 PM

Good afternoon, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor, committee staff, and members of the community. I am Charon P.W. Hines, Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL). I'm honored to present Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) testimony on Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed budget, Grow DC. I'm joined today by Angela Richardson, DACL's Chief of Staff, and Regat Hagos, DACL's Chief Operating Officer.

I want to begin by extending my sincere appreciation to Mayor Bowser. Despite the challenges we have faced this budget cycle, the District remains resilient and poised for progress. This strength is a direct result of the Mayor's unwavering dedication to making thoughtful, targeted investments that not only support our city's recovery but also build a foundation for sustained growth in the years ahead. Her vision and leadership inspire us all, and I am grateful to serve within her Administration.

I also want to recognize and commend the outstanding team at DACL along with our broader Senior Service Network. Their dedication to

supporting seniors, adults with disabilities, and caregivers is the cornerstone of our agency’s achievements and our ability to empower older adults to live with confidence and dignity. Reflecting on the remarks I shared at our FY2025 Performance Oversight Hearing just a few months ago, I once again thank our seniors for their trust and partnership. My personal mantra remains constant — “without seniors, there is no us.” I will continue to champion this truth as we renew our commitment to delivering the essential services that uphold the well-being of our residents and strengthen our community.

To our new seniors: **thank you for holding us accountable and walking alongside us through every season.**

On Tuesday, May 27, 2025, Mayor Bowser released her FY26 budget proposal—a responsible and strategic financial plan that protects critical government functions while advancing equity across all eight wards to Grow DC. In the face of an anticipated \$1.1 billion revenue shortfall by 2029, the Mayor’s approach centers on:

- preserving essential programs
- avoiding across-the-board cuts
- and making targeted investments that make a meaningful difference—**especially for older adults.**

As I shared last year during *your birthday* budget hearing, our priorities have not changed. DACL remains focused on five core pillars that shape our mission and impact:

- **socialization**
- **transportation**
- **nutrition**
- **helping older residents age safely in place**
- **and delivering high-quality supports.**

These areas reflect the lived experiences of the District’s aging population and guide how we allocate resources and shape services.

Today, I want to highlight two of Mayor Bowser’s proposed budget enhancements that are squarely focused on helping older adults age in

place, staying in the neighborhoods they know and love while also ensuring access to nutritious food that supports well-being.

First is the Mayor's continued investment in **Safe at Home**, the Mayor's signature senior program designed to help older adults remain safely in their residences. Mayor Bowser often says, "*The best home for a senior is the home they are already in.*" Safe at Home brings that sentiment to life. Since its launch, this program has made **close to 7,500 homes** safer through modifications such as grab bars, stair lifts, handrails, ramps, and improved lighting—enhancing mobility and preventing falls.

The FY26 budget includes a **\$300,000 enhancement** to Safe at Home, which will enable us to support **an additional 45 households** with critical safety modifications. These changes are practical and transformative, allowing residents to retain independence, reduce hospitalization risks, and feel secure where they live.

Second, I want to emphasize the Mayor's commitment to **combating senior hunger** through a proposed **\$425,000 investment in the Home**

Delivered Meals program. As more District residents age in place, we have seen increasing demand for services that meet people where they are. Currently, approximately **1,400 homebound older adults** receive meals delivered directly to their doorsteps—providing nourishment, peace of mind, and human connection.

With this additional funding, we will be able to serve **150 more residents**, extending our reach and addressing one of the most basic but critical needs, food security. This enhancement will help reduce hunger, promote health equity, and support older adults in maintaining their independence and vitality.

Beyond these key investments, DACL is well suited to maintain all of our programs. Our **senior wellness centers** and **community dining sites** provide opportunities for connection, physical activity, and enrichment. These are welcoming places where older adults gather not just for meals and movement, but for conversation, purpose, and joy.

Our **transportation programs**, including the Connector Card and Senior MedExpress, remain a cornerstone of independence. Whether traveling to medical appointments, grocery stores, or community events, older residents rely on these offerings to stay engaged and mobile.

We are also committed to **raising the bar for service delivery** through data-informed planning, improved operational practices, and expanded outreach. From language access and digital inclusion to timely response systems and streamlined referrals, we are working to make every touchpoint more effective and accessible.

Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee, the proposed FY26 budget reflects a thoughtful balance—addressing fiscal constraints while continuing to invest in the well-being of our older residents. At DACL, we are unwavering in our mission to help seniors **live boldly, safely, and with dignity in the communities they cherish.**

Thank you for your partnership and advocacy. I look forward to your questions and to working together on this shared commitment.