

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



**Fiscal Year 2026-2027
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

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10:00 AM

Good afternoon, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor, and Committee staff. I am Charon P.W. Hines, the Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living, affectionately known as DACL. I am honored to testify before you today to present Mayor Muriel Bowser's proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget, **Grow DC**. Joining me today are Angela Richardson, DACL's Chief of Staff, and Regat Hagos, DACL's Chief Operating Officer.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Mayor Bowser for her leadership and for the vision reflected in the upcoming fiscal year's budget. As we continue to **run through the tape** with the Mayor, this budget reflects a disciplined and forward-looking approach – one that prioritizes investments in education and public safety, protects robust health care for residents, grows our economy, and most importantly, **preserves core city services** that residents rely on every day.

For older adults in the District, those core services are deeply personal. They are the programs delivered through DACL that make it possible to

get to a doctor's appointment, to receive a meal, to remain in their homes safely, and to stay connected to their communities. And I am proud to share that in the Mayor's FY27 budget, **DACL remains strong and stable**, with our programs protected and positioned to continue serving thousands of seniors across all eight wards.

Madam Chair, over the course of Mayor Bowser's tenure, we have seen sustained and meaningful investments in older adults—investments that have fundamentally changed how seniors experience aging in the District of Columbia. Through core programs such as **Safe at Home, Home Delivered Meals, Connector Card, and Senior MedExpress**, the District has collectively supported **tens of thousands of older adults**.

What is important to recognize is that this progress is the result of consistent, intentional investment over time – investment that reflects a clear understanding that supporting seniors is essential to the overall strength and well-being of our city.

As we move into FY27, that commitment continues. And in a time where difficult fiscal decisions must be made, what stands out most in this budget is the Mayor’s decision to **protect and preserve the core services that seniors rely on every single day.**

As I have shared in previous hearings, DACL’s work is guided by five core pillars:

socialization, transportation, nutrition, helping older residents age safely in place, and delivering high-quality supports. These pillars reflect the lived experiences of older adults in the District, and the FY27 budget maintains stability across each of these areas—allowing us to continue delivering services that are **responsive, consistent, and impactful.**

Transportation — A Cornerstone of Independence

Transportation is often the deciding factor between isolation and

participation. The **Connector Card program** continues to provide older adults with flexibility—allowing them to travel on their own schedule for medical care, errands, and social engagement. Since its launch, **8,633 seniors** have used the program, reflecting both its value and its demand. And in FY27, Mayor Bowser is prioritizing continuity in service delivery, ensuring seniors continue to receive reliable and consistent transportation support.

At the same time, we are expanding access for populations with more complex barriers. The **Returning Citizens Senior Transportation Pilot Program** recognizes that older adults returning from incarceration face unique challenges in reconnecting to services and stabilizing their lives. Thanks to the Council’s **\$150,000 investment**, the program will fund more than **4,400 one-way rides**, supporting access to medical care, housing services, workforce programs, and supervision requirements — helping seniors stabilize and rebuild their lives with dignity.

Together, these efforts reflect a broader approach: mobility is not just about transportation—it is about access to opportunity.

Helping Seniors Age in Place

For most older adults, remaining at home represents stability, familiarity, and control over how they age. The Mayor’s signature program for seniors, **Safe at Home** has been central to making that possible, supporting **8,096 households** through practical home modifications that significantly reduce fall risk and improve daily safety since its inception.

The Mayor’s **FY26 investment of \$300,000** expanded this work, allowing DACL to reach **45 additional households** with critical safety upgrades.

As the District’s population continues to age, the importance of this program will only grow. Aging in place is not just a preference – it is a cost-effective and person-centered approach that allows residents to

remain in their communities while avoiding more intensive interventions. While the FY26 enhancement represented a one-time investment to expand capacity, the Mayor's commitment to Safe at Home remains steadfast. The program will continue at a \$4 million level in FY27 – allowing us to deliver more than 600 home modifications that help seniors remain safely in their homes.

Nutrition — Supporting Health and Reducing Isolation

Nutrition remains one of the most essential services we provide, particularly for older adults who are aging in place and may face barriers to accessing healthy, consistent meals. Over the course of the Mayor's tenure, the **Home Delivered Meals program** has served **44,515 seniors**, providing reliable access to nutritious meals for residents who may be homebound or unable to prepare food independently.

The Mayor's **\$425,000 investment in FY26** expanded this reach, allowing us to serve **150 additional seniors**. This investment recognizes

that nutrition is directly tied to health outcomes, chronic disease management, and the ability to remain independent.

At the same time, we are strengthening opportunities for seniors to engage in community settings. In Ward 7, new dining sites at Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church and Zion Baptist Church of Eastland Gardens provide spaces where seniors can gather, share meals, and maintain social connections.

This dual approach – meeting seniors where they are while also creating opportunities for engagement – allows us to address both physical and social needs at the same time. In FY27, Mayor Bowser is sustaining DACL’s critical nutrition services that support seniors’ health, independence, and well-being.

Socialization — Strengthening Community Connections

Connection is a critical component of overall well-being, and it cannot be treated as secondary to other services. Through our senior wellness

centers, events, and neighborhood-based programs, we create consistent opportunities for seniors to remain active and engaged.

The **Village model** plays a central role in this work by building localized support networks that help seniors stay connected to their communities. As this model expands, we are focused not only on growth, but on long-term sustainability – ensuring that Villages have the resources and structure needed to support residents over time.

This work reflects a broader understanding: reducing isolation is not about a single program – it requires building systems that foster connection at every level. And in FY27, Mayor Bowser is continuing to strengthen opportunities for seniors to stay socially connected and engaged in their communities.

High-Quality Supports — ADRD and Workforce Development

As needs become more complex, our approach must evolve to meet them.

DACL strengthened its capacity to support residents living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) by hiring the agency's first **ADRD Coordinator**, Giovanna Hunt, allowing for more coordinated, specialized support for both individuals and their caregivers. The program has received **114 referrals**, reflecting strong coordination across DACL and with external partners. In addition, **65 community-based presentations** have reached more than **1,000 residents**, helping families better understand dementia and navigate available resources. In FY27, Mayor Bowser is reinforcing the District's commitment to high-quality, specialized supports for seniors and their caregivers.

At the same time, we are creating opportunities for older adults to remain engaged through workforce development. Madam Chair, your FY26 investment in workforce development has provided **14 older adults** with temporary, part-time employment opportunities. Through our lead agencies, these seniors are now contributing across **all eight**

wards, supporting program delivery while remaining active participants in their communities.

This work reflects a broader shift – recognizing older adults not only as recipients of services, but as contributors to the system itself.

Closing

Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee, the FY27 budget reflects a clear and steady approach – protecting the services that residents depend on while continuing to move the District forward. For older adults, these services shape daily life. They support independence, improve health, and strengthen connection to community.

We are proud of the foundation that has been built over the past decade, and we remain focused on carrying that work forward so that every senior in the District has the opportunity to **Live Boldly**.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.