

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



**Fiscal Year 2018-2019**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
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Director

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

John A. Wilson Building  
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## INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, Committee staff, and members of the community. My name is Laura Newland, and I am the Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL). I am pleased to testify today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser to discuss the performance, accomplishments, and activities of DAACL.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Mayor Bowser for her leadership and strong support of all District residents, especially our seniors, adults with disabilities, and caregivers. I'd also like to recognize my exceptional team—they demonstrate the highest level of commitment to the work they do in delivering programs, supports, and services to improve the lives of so many District residents. Joining me today is DAACL's Deputy Director, Aurora Delespin-Jones, who exemplifies DAACL's values.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2018 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.

Mayor Bowser has asked each agency to develop strategies to ensure that every resident has a fair shot in a city as diverse and inclusive as Washington, D.C. Our Mayor has asked all District residents this question: "What would you do if you were not afraid to fail?" For the Department



of Aging and Community Living, the answer is simple - even if the path to achieve it is not. Our goal is to end social isolation and loneliness. Madam Chair, we know the devastating health impact of social isolation and loneliness. It is similar to smoking more than 15 cigarettes a day and is more consequential than inactivity and obesity. It's also been linked to increased risks of developing chronic disease, increased risk of falls, increased risk for hospital readmissions, and increased risk of dementia. More than half of District residents over the age of 60 live alone. While that doesn't necessarily mean that half of our population is socially isolated, it does mean that we as a community need to be extra vigilant in ensuring that our communities are a place where no one is left behind. I am confident that DACL, with strong partnerships with our Mayor, this committee, our sister agencies, our community partners, and Washingtonians, will continue to discover new and better ways of creating a community of supports for ending social isolation and loneliness.

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; to promote longevity, independence, dignity, and choice for aged District residents, District residents with disabilities regardless of age, and caregivers; to ensure the rights of older adults and their families, and prevent their abuse, neglect, and exploitation; to uphold the core values of service excellence, respect, compassion, integrity, and accountability; and to lead efforts to strengthen service delivery and capacity by engaging community stakeholders and partners to leverage resources.



DACL operates the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC), which provides a coordinated system of information and access for individuals seeking long-term services and supports. Additionally, we fund the Senior Service Network (SSN) comprised of 22 community-based, non-profit, and private organizations that operate 40 programs in all eight wards. I am proud to say that these programs provide the critical supports, services, and resources District residents need to live well in their own homes and in the communities they know and love. Today, I will provide an update on the agency's performance and highlight some of our key accomplishments in FY 2018 and FY 2019 to date, as well as a roadmap for the rest of this fiscal year and beyond.

### **Key Fiscal Year 2018 Accomplishments**

Last year, we ensured that investments made in senior programs went toward strengthening community bonds by increasing outreach, working with the community to create programs for underserved populations, and improving and adapting programs based on performance and outcomes, and we continue this work in FY 2019.

### **Increasing Outreach**

In FY 2018, DACL began requiring all agency staff, no matter their position, to complete four hours of community outreach every quarter, which has increased the agency's ability to participate in and host regular outreach at places of worship, senior apartments, recreation sites, hospitals, and the DC Jail. DACL completed 207 community outreach events in FY 2018, an increase of 73 more events than in FY 2017. In addition, DACL's signature events continue to draw more seniors from all eight wards.



## **Community Engagement on DACL Programs**

In FY 2018, DACL focused on increasing outreach to underserved populations, promoting DACL programs and supports, and mobilizing the community to reach out to isolated seniors. I want to thank the older LGBTQ residents, service providers, and advocates who were willing to work with us and advise us on the programs that were the most needed and most wanted. In FY 2018, we launched the first citywide entertainment and social program around a meal, peer-led support groups, and citywide events for LGBTQ seniors. For the first time, last year we hosted a Senior Pride Party, and during the Capital Pride Parade, we walked alongside our LGBTQ seniors in the inaugural DACL senior pride trolley. Thanks to this collaborative effort, we are creating new safe spaces and making our traditional senior service programs a welcoming space - for everyone.

We also worked with the community in Wards 2 and 3 on improving programming where DACL does not have a dedicated wellness center. Together, we assessed the preferences of the community and DACL launched a new satellite senior wellness program in Wards 2 and 3. It's called Around Town DC, and we use community spaces to deliver the same high-quality programs found in Senior Wellness Centers to connect residents to the programming that currently exists. Within the first month, 76 participants have engaged in one of our new Around Town DC classes. Of those, 65 are engaging with DACL programming for the very first time!



Madam Chair, in FY 2018, DACL also embarked in a year-long process to produce and submit our 2019-2022 State Plan on Aging to our federal partners at the Administration for Community Living. We engaged participants in all eight wards in interactive, small-group exercises to collect the community's thoughts, opinions, and feelings on what the agency's objectives and strategies should be. This feedback was used to develop actionable goals and priorities that will drive the agency over the next four years. Through our State Plan, we are holding ourselves even more accountable to ensure the voice of the community is not just reflected in our plans for the future, but will be central to driving us forward as we continue to make DC the best city in the world to age. Our State Plan process was so successful that our federal partners praised the District's efforts in ensuring the community not only participated, but co-created the priorities in the State Plan.

### **Improving and Adapting Programs Based on Performance and Outcomes**

Madam Chair, over the last three years, our agency has had an aggressive outreach and engagement schedule in all eight wards. As the Mayor often reminds her directors, we work for the residents, and we have to talk to people to understand what's working and what's not.

We heard from seniors that they wanted more variety and healthier food options. So in FY 2018, we formed a new partnership with Hungry Harvest and began delivering boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables to homebound seniors to improve their health and wellness and provide more choice. DACL also partnered with faith-based organizations to provide gleaning tables for seniors who qualify for SNAP and to create the Share Food program, which provides a package of fresh fruits and food items to supplement the diets of low income seniors.



Safe at Home, a program you helped us create, has continued to be one of our most popular programs and is now a national model for community living. The program provides in-home safety adaptations to reduce the risk of falls in and around the homes of qualifying seniors and adults with disabilities. In FY 2018, the Safe at Home program served more clients than in any previous fiscal year, largely due to operational improvements and adding a new grantee to improve process times. The program made 1,031 homes safer through in-home safety adaptations, a 73 percent increase from the previous year, and installed 617 security cameras compared to 100 cameras in FY 2017. Clients reported having 50 percent more confidence in moving around their homes. We know this program is keeping our seniors safer in the homes they know and love.

In FY 2018, DACL rolled out its newest program, Senior MedExpress. This program provides round-trip transportation through Yellow Cab Company for qualified District seniors to essential life-sustaining medical appointments or to appointments for public benefits. Madam Chair, we heard from our seniors that they wanted more flexibility in their scheduling, convenience, and access to more rides. Senior MedExpress is doing just that through our partnership with Yellow Cab. I am excited to report that the implementation of this service has been a success – according to our projections, we expect a 14 percent increase in rides this year.

### **Fiscal Year 2019 Outlook**

Just last week, the Mayor formally signed legislation designating the former DC Office on Aging to the Department of Aging and Community Living. This creates an opportunity to strengthen our brand across all programs, services, and activities and ensure that more senior residents,



adults with disabilities, and caregivers know exactly who we are and what we do. As I mentioned before, we are focused on ending social isolation and loneliness in the District. DACL has an incredible portfolio of programs that have been successful in targeted interventions for potentially isolated residents. In FY 2019, DACL will work toward this goal by increasing our communications and outreach, strengthening our programs, and increasing access to programs strengthen community bonds. This includes:

- Ensuring our new brand is recognizable across all senior programs funded by the Agency and reflects our vision and mission;
- Increasing access to the Safe at Home program by implementing a new cost-sharing component for those who do not meet the current income requirements;
- Building a more age-friendly, sustainable community for residents with Alzheimer's and Dementia Related Diseases;
- Promoting the model of neighbors helping neighbors across the city by funding five additional senior villages and improving the coordination of services and activities for seniors - no matter where they live; and,
- Increasing access to wellness with \$1.5 million for the expansion of Model Cities Senior Wellness Center (Ward 5) and Congress Heights Senior Wellness Center (Ward 8) so that more of our seniors can participate in activities.

Finally, I want to touch on the impact of the tragic fire at Arthur Capper senior building in Navy Yard on DC as a community, and DACL specifically. Fortunately, no one lost their life as a result of the fire, but all 161 households who were living at the building at the time of the fire lost their homes and most of their possessions. There are few things more humbling than to



witness such devastation without having the ability to make that devastation immediately go away. Mayor Bowser instructed all agencies to deploy every available resource to provide all the necessary support to our fellow Washingtonians. Government agencies, community partners, District residents, local businesses, and many, many others came together to support Capper residents. But most of all, the residents of Arthur Capper stuck together. They supported each other, spoke up for their neighbors, shared laughs over meals, and hugs when they were needed. This is what it means to be a community. Madam Chair, we know that government cannot create community, but government can support community in supporting each other. And we will continue to be here for them, for as long as they need.

This is our charge at DACL. No matter where you live in the District of Columbia, you are not alone. There is no shame in asking for help if you need it. There is a community eager to connect with you. DACL has a program for everyone who wants to connect with us. And if you think we don't, reach out to us and help us create something you want to see.

## **CONCLUSION**

As you can see, Madam Chair, the Administration's priority is making sure DC is a city where all can live and thrive, and where every resident, no matter their age, income, or background can live a good life. DACL is fully engaged in this priority by supporting our collective community in making meaningful connections to our seniors, people with disabilities, and their caregivers, and to make it easier for our constituents to connect with the larger community, if they choose. If we can work together to end social isolation and loneliness in the District, we know we will improve health outcomes for people in all eight wards, reduce health disparities, and remove



much of the fear around what it means to age. We all want a community and a government to supports us as we and our loved ones grow older. And as the seniors here have taught me, growing older does not mean getting old. In closing, Madam Chair, thank you for your leadership and support, as I know we share the same goals. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for making sure DC remains the best city in the world to age!

This concludes my formal testimony. I am happy to address your questions at this time. Thank you.

