

**ANSWERS TO COMMITTEE QUESTIONS FOR
FY17 PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARINGS**

COMMISSION ON AGING

Q1. Please provide a list of the Commission’s current members. For each member, please provide the following:

- The member’s name;
 - The Ward, agency or organization the member represents;
 - Who appointed the member;
 - When the member’s term expires; and
 - Attendance record:
- *A roster of current, voting Commissioners, including their Ward of residence and date their term expires, follows. Commissioners are all appointed by the Mayor.*

Commission on Aging Voting Members as of February 3, 2017			
First Name	Last Name	Term Ends	Ward
<i>Romaine</i>	<i>Thomas (Chair)</i>	<i>10/28/2017</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Ronald</i>	<i>Swanda (Vice Chair)</i>	<i>10/28/2017</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Jacqueline</i>	<i>Arguelles</i>	<i>10/28/2017</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Clarence Buddy</i>	<i>Moore</i>	<i>10/28/2019</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>George</i>	<i>Arnstein</i>	<i>10/28/2019</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Marguerite</i>	<i>Pridgen</i>	<i>10/27/2017</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Brenda</i>	<i>Atkinson- Willoughby</i>	<i>10/28/2018</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Carolyn</i>	<i>Nicholas</i>	<i>10/28/2018</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Grace</i>	<i>Lewis</i>	<i>10/28/2017</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Charles</i>	<i>Hicks</i>	<i>10/28/2019</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Sheila</i>	<i>Dean</i>	<i>10/27/2017</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Constance</i>	<i>Woody</i>	<i>10/28/2018</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Guleford</i>	<i>Bobo</i>	<i>10/27/2019</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Barbara</i>	<i>Hair</i>	<i>10/28/2017</i>	<i>8</i>

By statute¹, ex officio (non-voting) members of the Commission are the Directors of the Department of Human Services, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Recreation, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Employment Services, the Public Library, the Chief of the Metropolitan

¹ DC Code, Title 7: Human Health Care and Safety; Subtitle A: General; Chapter 5: Programs for Older Citizens; Unit A: Office on Aging and Commission on Aging.

Police Department, and a member of the Council of the District of Columbia. Ex officio members from the Executive branch were identified in the Fall of 2016.

To our knowledge, the ex officio member of the D.C. Council has not yet been identified.

- *After accounting for absences that were excused in-advance by the Chair, eleven of the twelve Commissioners attended all meetings in CY16. One Commissioner had unexcused absences for six of ten Commission meetings, and has recently been replaced.*

Q2. Please provide a list of the Commission’s meeting dates, times, and locations, whether a quorum was reached, for FY16 and FY17 to date.

Generally, Commission meetings begin at 10:00 am on the fourth Wednesday of each month in the DCOA offices. If feasible, the Commission may choose not to meet during July and/or August.

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Number of Commissioners Present / Appointed</i>	<i>Quorum?</i>	<i>Venue</i>
<i>2/14/16</i>	<i>11 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>3/23/16</i>	<i>13 / 13</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>4/27/16</i>	<i>11 / 13</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>5/25/16</i>	<i>11 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>6/22/16</i>	<i>11 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>7/20/16</i>	<i>8 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DOES</i>
<i>9/28/16</i>	<i>8 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>10/26/16</i>	<i>9 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>11/16/16</i>	<i>5 / 12</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>12/14/16</i>	<i>7 / 12</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>
<i>1/25/17</i>	<i>15 / 15</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>DCOA</i>

Q3. Did the Commission receive funds in FY16 and FY17 to date? If so, please provide the following:

- The amount of the funding;
- The source of the funding;
- A list of all expenditures; and
- A description of how these funds furthered the Board’s/Commission’s mission.

The Commission received no funding in FY16, or any previous year. We do not anticipate receiving funds in FY17. The Commission operates with technical and clerical support provided on an ad hoc basis by DCOA.

Q4. Please describe the Commission’s activities in FY16 and FY17, to date.

- *Early in FY16, the Commission submitted to MOTA a list of the “ideal characteristics” that should guide selection of the person selected to replace the previous DCOA Director. Subsequently, the Commission Chair and Vice Chair met with the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Appointments (MOTA) to explain and*

elaborate on these suggested qualifications. Subsequently, the Commission testified before this Committee in support of Laura Newland's appointment to lead DCOA.

- *The Commission met ten times during CY16. Each meeting included an extensive discussion with DCOA's Executive Director (ED) and staff about the "joys", issues and concerns affecting seniors. Each meeting also included two or three "outside" presentations/speakers. For instance, the Age-Friendly DC program director has provided an update at every meeting. Meetings always include time for Commissioners to report on activities or concerns specific to their Ward, and for Committee reports. The Commission has established committees on Health and Wellness, Transportation, Housing, Elder Abuse and Employment. The public is encouraged to attend all meetings, and when time allows to ask questions or make comments.*
- *At the request of DCOA's ED, the Commission provided advice on how to best structure the senior service network. To fully understand this system and develop recommendations, the Commission held an all-day retreat in July. Subsequent to this retreat, an ad hoc committee met several times to best articulate the Commission's recommendations. A copy of the Commission's final recommendations to DCOA are attached.*
- *The Commission passed a resolution supporting "Death with Dignity" legislation, and then actively communicated its support to the Council and the Mayor.*
- *The Commission testified at DCOA's FY16 performance oversight hearings and the budget hearings. It also provided testimony supporting the Office of People's Council in the dealing with the PEPCO merger*
- *The Commission met with George Washington University to advise and assist them in conducting DCOA's Senior Needs Assessment, and is now reviewing the final report.*
- *To discuss senior programs and needs, the Chair and various Commissioners met throughout the year with numerous community organizations and churches. Multiple Commissioners, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, attended more than 20 "town hall" meetings organized by DCOA throughout the District in FY16.*
- *The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission meet monthly with the DCOA ED and staff in order to plan the next Commission meeting and discuss issues and priorities.*
- *The Chair and other Commissioners represent seniors at many informational, social and recreational events sponsored by D.C.; such as the Mayor's Senior Symposium, the Mayor's Holiday Party, the Centenarian luncheon, the Ms. Senior D.C. pageant (Cameo Club) and various events at Wellness Centers in six Wards. The Commission Chair also represented D.C. seniors at Representative Norton's Annual Legislative Day.*
- *The Commission Chair and Vice Chair are members of the Age-Friendly D.C. Task Force and co-lead two of the Task Force's committees.*

February 6, 2017

- *The Commission met with representatives of the D.C. Superior Court to advise them on how the Court can best serve seniors.*

Q5. Please describe the Commission's goals in FY17 and the plan/timeline for completion.

By the end of FY 17, the Commission's goals are to:

- *Advise DCOA on how to better identify and communicate with underserved seniors who may not attend activities at any of D.C.'s Senior Wellness Centers, or are isolated at home.*
- *Update the Commission's guidelines for operating "Mini-Commissions on Aging" in each Ward, and ensure Mini-Commissions are active and effective.*
- *Advocate (to the Mayor, Council and D.C. Government agencies) on the need for achieving the Goals and Strategies identified in the current Age-Friendly D.C. Plan. The final report (for 2012-2017) will be submitted to the World Health Organization in October, 2017.*
- *Assist the Manger of the Age-Friendly Dc Initiative with organizing public consultations related to the next AFDC Plan, covering 2018-2013. Arrange at least one Age-Friendly D.C. public consultation in each Ward, and help ensure the LGBTQ community is adequately consulted during this process.*
- *Assess the Mayor's budget for FY18, and before the Council's budget hearing determine its impact on seniors.*
- *Review DCOA performance, compare it to the needs of seniors, and testify at the Council's agency performance and budget hearings.*
- *Continue to review the DCOA Needs Assessment, and advise DCOA on how to best meet the needs identified therein. Advise DCOA in developing the next State Plan on Aging, and other agencies proposing plans that affect seniors.*
- *As necessary, comment on proposed Federal and D.C. legislation, rules, policies and regulations.*

Q6. What are the Commission's biggest strengths?

- *The Commission now has fourteen energetic members (three appointed in January), all of whom have demonstrated sound leadership abilities, sound awareness of senior needs, and multiple connections with D.C.'s older adults.*
- *Based on mutual trust and respect, sustained by an effective conduit for communication, the Commission has developed an excellent relationship with the Executive Director and senior staff of DCOA.*
- *The Commission's Chair, Romaine Thomas, and many other Commissioners, are widely known and respected by D.C.'s seniors, members of the DC. Council and the Mayor.*

Q7. What were the Commission's biggest accomplishments in FY16?

February 6, 2017

- *Late in 2015, the Commission submitted a list to the Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments (MOTA) describing the "ideal characteristics" that should be used to advise the selection of a new Director for the Office on Aging. Subsequently, the Commission's Chair and Vice Chair met with MOTA to elucidate on these characteristics. After the Mayor's selection process was completed, the Commission testified before this Committee in support of Laura Newland's appointment to lead the DCOA.*
- *At the request of DCOA's ED, the Commission provided advice on how to best structure the senior service network. A copy of the Commission's final recommendations to DCOA are attached.*
- *To assist with the Mayor's selection of Commissioners, the Commission chose to advise the Mayor (through MOTA and DCOA) on the skills, knowledge and experience that would make an "ideal" Commissioner. The Commission did not expect that any single candidate could satisfy all the suggested characteristics; and the Commission continues to play no other role in the selection process. Three new Commissioners were sworn-in in January 2016, and all bring significant skills, knowledge and experience to the Commission.*
- *On October, 2016, the Commission passed a resolution that identified the need for "Death with Dignity" legislation, and then actively and successfully communicated this need to the Council and the Mayor. The legislation was enacted.*
- *Because of the significant potential benefit to seniors, the Commission actively supported the Uniform Paid Leave Act. The legislation was enacted.*
- *Through numerous community meetings, the Commission has gained significant credibility, respect and an enhanced awareness of its activities among seniors and senior service providers.*

Q8. What challenges does the Commission face?

Representing a large and diverse population of seniors living in all eight Wards, on a multitude of issues, is often difficult for a Commission of fourteen, all-volunteer members.

Q9. Is the Commission required to post meeting notes or agendas online? Has the Commission done so?

- *The Commission must meet all applicable standards described in the D.C. Open Meetings Act. DCOA has dedicated legal and other staff resources to advise and support the Commission with these efforts. A roster of Commissioners and recent meeting minutes are available to the public via the DCOA website.*

Q10. How does the Commission represent and solicit feedback from residents? Please describe:

- The process for soliciting feedback and number of submissions
 - What has the Board/Commission learned from this feedback?
 - How has the Commission changed its practices as a result of such feedback?
-
- *Each Commissioner is expected to develop regular contacts with a wide range of seniors residing in their Ward, and to report significant issues at the next meeting of the Commission. If an issue is unique to a single Ward, the Commissioners from that Ward are encouraged to seek resolution. If the issue is common to multiple Wards, the Commission will seek resolution. Other than meeting minutes, we do not track the number of issues raised.*
 - *The Commission believes counting the number of comments we receive is far less important than resolving issues. Creating a tracking system for the Commission would impose an impossible and costly administrative burden on the all-volunteer Commission. We also note that DCOA has an extensive, federally-mandated system for tracking contacts and the services provided.*
 - *The feedback the Commission receives from residents focuses primarily, if not exclusively, on the adequacy of senior services, not the performance of the Commission itself. Accordingly, suggestions for improving the performance of the Commission come from the Commission itself. The most significant recent performance improvements, all suggested by the Commission itself, have been re-institution of Committees, stabilizing the venue for Commission meetings, creating a standard template for meeting agendas, conducting an annual retreat and updating commission operating procedures (see following bullet).*
 - *In 1998, the Commission developed written guidelines for establishing and operating “Mini-Commissions on Aging” in each Ward. Mini-Commissions help the Commissioners representing a Ward to communicate with a wider range of seniors than would be otherwise be possible. Commissioners then use input from their Mini-Commission, and others, to choose the issues to be discussed in their monthly Ward report to the Commission. The Commission’s current guidelines for Mini-Commissions are now being revised to allow more structural and procedural flexibility between Wards, while maintaining the primary goal of increased communication with seniors in each Ward.*
 - *Whenever DCOA has a “town hall” meeting, Commissioners for that Ward attend, listen and comment. Commissioners are also encouraged to communicate regularly with any DCOA service providers serving their Ward.*

Q11. What is being done to promote greater diversity in the composition of the Commission’s membership?

The Commission has no role in selecting its members. Statutes require the Mayor to use the following criteria when selecting members of the Commission:

“Members shall be appointed with due consideration for fair geographical distribution, representation from organizations of older persons, public and voluntary agencies concerned with the aged, and members of the general public who have given evidence of particular dedication to and understanding of the needs of the aged. At least 8 members shall be 60 years of age or over, and all must be residents of the District of Columbia.”

Q12. The Office on Aging recently completed a 2016 Needs Assessment. In the opinion of the Commission, what should be the greatest takeaways for the Office on Aging from the assessment?

The Commission received the final Needs Assessment on January 25th, 2017, and has not had sufficient time for a thorough review. The Commission anticipates commenting on the Needs Assessment at the Performance Oversight and Budget hearings.

However, after preliminary review, the Commission observes that this is the first credible assessment of senior needs in many years. It should be invaluable to making both budgeting and programing decisions.

Q13. Additionally, are there any issues the Commission believes the Needs Assessment did not sufficiently cover?

The Commission received the final Needs Assessment on January 25th, 2017, and has not had sufficient time for a thorough review. The Commission anticipates commenting on the Needs Assessment at both the Performance Oversight and Budget hearings.

Q14. Please detail the Commission’s efforts in FY16 for outreach and engagement with seniors in the District? Does this fall under the authority and responsibility of the Commission?

The Commission is chartered to provide advice and has no other authority.

In order to perform its duties, the Commission strives to be actively involved with community outreach and engagement. Key activities are:

- *Each Commissioner is expected to develop regular contacts with a wide range of seniors residing in their Ward, and to report significant issues at the next meeting of the Commission.*
- *In 1998, the Commission developed written guidelines for establishing and operating “Mini-Commissions on Aging” in each Ward. Mini-Commissions help the Commissioners representing a Ward to communicate with a wider range of seniors than would be otherwise be possible.*
- *Whenever DCOA has a “town hall” meeting, Commissioners for that Ward attend, listen and comment. Commissioners are also encouraged to communicate regularly with any DCOA service providers serving their Ward.*

February 6, 2017

- *Various reports and customer/consumer surveys performed by DCOA, the Age-Friendly D.C. Initiative, DHCF, DDOT and DHCD were reviewed by the Commission throughout FY16. These surveys all serve as an excellent means of community outreach, engagement and understanding.*

Q 15. The Committee wants to better understand how the Commission works in coordination with the Office on Aging. Could you please explain the following:

- What is the specific role of the Commission?
- How does the Commission assist the role of the Office on Aging?
- Does the Commission advise the Director on agency operations, assist in reviewing plans of action prior to implementation, or does the Commission advise the Mayor?
 - *The role of the Commission, as prescribed by Statute (§7-504.01), is to “... advise the Mayor, the Director of the Office on Aging, the Council of the District of Columbia, and the public concerning the views and needs of the aged in the District of Columbia.” The Commission provides advice to these agencies whenever the Commission deems it appropriate or when advice is requested.*
 - *Statutes (§7-504.10) specifically stipulate that the Commission should review and comment on the annual state plan required under the Older Americans Act, any proposed District and federal legislation, regulations, policies and programs impacting seniors, and on the Director's policy recommendations on issues affecting the health, safety, and welfare of the aged.*

February 6, 2017

Attachment

September 16, 2016

Ms. Laura Newland
Executive Director
D.C. Office on Aging
500 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Ms. Newland:

Your letter to the Commission in May 2016 asked for recommendations in two areas:

1. What steps should DCOA take to reach underserved seniors?
2. How can DCOA better coordinate services and improve service delivery, including use of a different grant structure.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to respond to these important and complex questions. However, the solutions chosen by DCOA may require an in-depth understanding of various laws and regulations, which is beyond the scope of the Commission's ability. However, to choose the best option(s) it is critical that DCOA thoroughly understand the needs of seniors and how seniors may perceive various options. This clearly is an appropriate role for the Commission. Accordingly, we have based our responses to you on the understanding that final decisions related to these questions are the responsibility of DCOA, not the Commission.

We continue to develop recommendations on your first question, and will be contacting you in the near future about that task.

After extensive consideration, the Commission forwards the following recommendations to your second question:

1. DCOA should proceed carefully in restructuring its grant making process.

Many seniors are under the impression that senior services in FY17 will be dramatically reduced. DCOA's stated intention of transferring some services out of the DCOA budget and into Medicaid (without service reductions) and has been widely misunderstood. Near-term reductions recently announced for the FY16 budget have created an environment of distrust among seniors. DCOA's current assessment of this situation is therefore timely and appropriate.

Changing the grant-making process could easily be misperceived by seniors as additional service reductions. This situation could be exacerbated by DCOA's stated goals of implementing cost-sharing for some its services and to requiring grant recipients to match a portion of their DCOA grant. Too much change over a

short time and unanticipated changes are not reassuring to seniors. Stability of services should be DCOA's hallmark.

The Commission is also concerned that in the process of re-bidding current service grants, these additional financial requirements may significantly limit the number of qualified organizations willing to apply, thereby adversely impacting senior services.

2. The Commission reaffirms the significance of Wellness Centers to our community. Accordingly, DCOA should ensure that the restructuring the grant-making process does not adversely impact the availability, scope or quality of services provided by Wellness Centers. In fact, the availability, scope, and quality of these services should be improved – not just maintained.

Restructuring the grant process in any way, merely to gain cost efficiencies or to achieve efficiency of operation, is insufficient justification for making these changes. Changes to the grant process should only be undertaken if they will also improve the quality, scope or availability of these services.

3. DCOA should retain a system of strong, lead agencies in each Ward. DCOA should continue its current system of using grantees for these services. One of the performance standards for all DCOA grantees should be development of innovative solutions to the specific needs of the population served.

More so than any of DCOA's other grantees, lead agencies are acutely aware of the broad array of challenges facing our most vulnerable seniors. DCOA should ensure that these agencies are empowered to propose innovative solutions, and to influence the goals and implementation of proposed solutions. Accordingly, responsibility for activities at all Wellness Centers and congregate meal sites should be assigned to the lead agency designated for that specific Ward.

Lead agencies are most likely to have well-established channels of communication with the entire senior community residing in their catchment area, and to have cadres of volunteers most able and willing to provide assistance. Other types of DCOA grantees are not likely to have not developed these volunteer resources. In effect, volunteers extend the reach of a lead agency and significantly magnify its impact. The expertise of an experienced lead agency staff, including licensed social workers who are intimately familiar with the population residing in a specific geographic area of the District, is the biggest single asset available to DCOA.

4. DCOA should improve the performance standards and oversight of the activities in Wellness Centers.

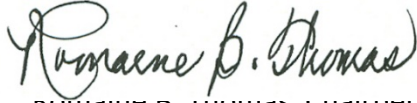
DCOA should ensure the performance standards for operating Wellness Centers are uniform throughout the District, and that required programs are robust, employ effective and proven practices (such as those used in other jurisdictions), and are aligned with the needs of seniors in that specific area. We note that National Council on Aging publishes Senior Center

February 6, 2017

accreditation standards. <https://www.ncoa.org/national-institute-of-senior-centers/standards-accreditation/senior-center-self-assessment-guidelines/>)

The day-to-day management of a Wellness Center is critical. DCOA should consider ways to improve management and direction of Wellness Centers, including the possibility of having a manager at each Wellness Center who is directly employed by DCOA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Romane B. Thomas".

ROMANE B. THOMAS, CHAIRPERSON
D.C. Commission on Aging