

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services**  
**Executive Office of the Mayor**



## **Fiscal Year 2022 Performance Oversight Hearing**

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

January 9, 2022, 9AM  
Virtual via Zoom

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization. My name is Gail Kohn, and I am the Age-Friendly DC Coordinator. Thank you for the invitation to testify on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser in today's hearing to discuss the aims,

goals, and strategies in the Age-Friendly DC Task Force 2018-2023 strategic plan. [Age-Friendly DC Task Force members provided updates prior to the most recent Age-Friendly DC Task Force virtual meetings hosted by the George Washington University Center for Aging, Health and Humanities, held Tuesday, November 16, 2021 1-3.](#) More recently Task Force members were also asked to review the responses to questions requested by this Committee.

You may recall that Age-Friendly Communities is a global initiative started by the World Health Organization (WHO) to inspire cities to focus on changing to:

- Improve accessibility for all in the physical environment,
- Foster lifelong mutual respect for all residents,
- Support healthy and safe aging throughout life.

The Age-Friendly program was brought to DC to the attention of DC government in 2012 by AARP-DC and faith-based leaders. AARP continues to support Age-Friendly efforts, most recently by supporting an intergenerational conference in October, led by George Washington University's Center for Aging, Health and Humanities, that brought youths together with experienced regional leaders to examine the future of lifelong aging. The success of Age-Friendly DC is dependent on the work of the Age-Friendly DC Task Force to stoke a deeper understanding across government and the community about the importance of equity lifelong, as we grow up and grow older. The Age-Friendly DC Task Force relies on DC government agency and community organization support to fulfill its aims, goals, and strategies.

Covid has underscored the importance of our reliance on one another to stay well and enjoy living in the nation's Capital. While we are all responsible for our own healthy aging, we know we must rely on one another, our government and community organizations for information and resources. That is why the Mayor followed the guidance of the World Health Organization, when writing the Establishment Order for the Age-Friendly DC Task Force by appointing leaders of District



government agencies and by community partners to structure to implement the Age-Friendly DC 2018-2023 Strategic Plan.

Together residents of all ages, DC government employees and community partners made meaningful progress implementing the goals of the 2018-2023 Age Friendly DC Strategic Plan about which you will hear more after a short review of the most notable accomplishments cited in the 2014-2017 Age-Friendly DC Strategic Plan Evaluation. We continue to benefit from:

- ✓ the [Age-Friendly DC block-by-block walk](#) which led to the DC Department of Transportation focus on walkability and pedestrian safety.
- ✓ The DC Department of Health Care Finance to Medicaid funding Services My Way and affordable assisted living, which has resulted in low-income frail residents having more choices than nursing home placement.
- ✓ More attention to the work opportunities for all residents, including those who are 50 and over.
- ✓ More programming in multiple agencies to include the growing population of older residents, resulting in less age-segregated, more intergenerational reasons to get up in the morning.
- ✓ More inclusion of older, experienced residents in emergency planning, resulting in training older neighborhood organizers.
- ✓ Continued awareness that home modifications for safety is essential, and have reached many more residents through the very popular Safe at Home program.
- ✓ Growing recognition of Neighborhood Villages, building on awareness that neighbor-to-neighbor support is valued by all.
- ✓ More direct service providers providing LGBTQ cultural competency training, which has led to more respectful inclusion of DC's LGBTQ population. With its 2017 report on its five years



of progress, DC moved to the forefront of the worldwide and national Age-Friendly network. Both WHO and United States agent, AARP recognized Mayor Bowser and the District of Columbia as a national and global leader in the network of Age-Friendly Cities.

In 2018 Mayor Bowser appointed the second Age-Friendly DC 2018-2023 Task Force. Using focus groups and the results of the Age-Friendly DC Livability Survey, completed by DC residents in every ward, Mayor Bowser and the Age-Friendly Task Force released the 2018-2023 Age-Friendly Strategic Plan. The new plan built on the city improvements and shortfalls noted by residents and set forth the new five-year plan, organizing the areas of focus around three pillars: Built Environment, Changing Attitudes about Growing Older, and Lifelong Health and Security. Age-Friendly DC 2023 supports initiatives led by 38 agencies across the government and leadership or support from 128 community organizations. In 2021, Age-Friendly DC completed three years of its five-year Strategic Plan. With your questions you have offered the Age-Friendly DC Task Force the opportunity to shine light on the [Age-Friendly DC Two-Year Progress Report](#), released by Mayor Bowser a year ago and progress since.

Here are a few 2021 highlights.

- **Meetings are open to even more who were interested.** We welcomed participants, particularly to our November 2020, May, and November 2021 meetings from across DC, because of the convenience of virtual gatherings. We spoke to groups and individuals living across the city, who wanted to learn more about Age-Friendly DC. The focus at gatherings was on equity, the backbone of the Age-Friendly initiative worldwide. Thanks to our many partnering organizations and the increasing prevalence of smart phones, virtual meetings drew participants from all areas of the city because travel to gatherings was not an obstacle. Moving forward to achieve greater equity, virtual options for attending meetings must be preserved after the pandemic subsides.



- **Benefited from new leaders who have joined and/or supported the Age-Friendly DC Task Force.** Academics are interested in Age-Friendly actions, in DC, across the metropolitan area where four other jurisdictions have followed the District, committing to transform to equity in lifelong aging. James Appleby, CEO, Gerontological Society of America was appointed co-chair of the Age-Friendly DC Task Force. George Washington University Center for Aging, Health and Humanities has continued to host Task Force and some of our Task Force committee meetings, while the GW Department of Public Health and Georgetown University’s graduate program for Health and Aging help by engaging graduate students in our activities. A speaker from Howard University brought our attention to technological connections to help residents with chronic conditions and in 2022 interns from the Howard University School of Social Work are anticipated. The University of the District of Columbia has joined gatherings to discuss long term care career motivators.
- **Emphasis on the importance of technological competency for all ages.** COVID-19 has made technology competency even more crucial to individuals, and the District has answered the call. The Office of the Chief Technology Officer, the DC Public Library, the Department of Aging and Community Living, the Mayor’s Office of Community Relations, the Mayor’s Offices of Community Affairs, DC’s Adult Charter Schools, DC’s Wellness Centers, DC Neighborhood Villages, our faith-based partners, Comcast and willing individuals of all ages are part of Tech Together, launched in 2021 by the Office of the Chief Technology Officer. OCTO’s Tech Together has and will continue to increase access to computers and connectivity. Students of all ages, parents, grandparents, and great grandparents are on a speedy learning curve. The gap is filling rapidly as we want to see family and friends and stay involved with our communities. We know scientists have demonstrated that isolation is a greater risk than ever, as we keep ourselves apart for health. Hearing the voices and seeing



on screens the faces of the growing number who attended Task Force meetings reinforced the importance of inclusion implementing the goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly DC 2023 Strategic Plan. [Technical.ly DC](#): Mayor Bowser's Fair Shot Budget for FY2022 set aside \$26.2 million to pay for devices for residents in need.

- **Food access.** DC Health, the Department of Aging and Community Living, the Agency For-Hire Vehicles and many, many community partners for growing food and meal sources. DC Health Produce Plus program provided 1,200 older residents with fresh vegetables and fruit, while 2,079 Food and Friends provided weekly medically tailored home-delivered meals and shelf-stable groceries to 2,079 District residents with serious medical conditions. [Capital Area Food Bank](#), a reliable source distributed nearly four million meals in the DC region in 2021. CAFB hosts the Age-Friendly DC Community Support and Health Services sub-committee meetings on nutrition.
- **Adult education and training.** Age-Friendly DC has identified [Office of the State Superintendent for Education](#) and [DC Adult Charter Schools](#) offer residents a network of schools with classes for adults, virtual when necessary. Enrollment has increased despite (or because of) Covid. The Department of Employment Services have implemented apprenticeship programs in 2021 and our DC Workforce Investment Council.
- **Addressing abuse, neglect, and undue influence.** The Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking, along with other partners are emphasizing education regarding lifelong financial planning as well as thwarting abuse, neglect, and scams resulting in undue influence on trusting adults by prosecuting offenders. Virtual DISB programs to educate and provide financial protection to older residents increased significantly due to the use of technology resulting in production of 50 consumer protection and advocacy presentations, 12



community-based information events, 4 virtual city-wide public forums and the Elder Abuse Prevention Committee Social Worker Training Conference for 100 +/- attendees.

- **Person-to-person contact by DC's 13 Villages and counting.** The FY2022 budget upped support by \$500,000 to these neighbor-to-neighbor grassroots support organizations, recognizing the volunteers who kept in regular telephone contact with neighbors, arranged transportation for vaccinations and supplies, upped fun and informative contacts among residents identifying as LGBTQ.
- **Home construction and adaptations.** The Department of Housing and Community Development has used the Housing Production Trust Funds to build new low-income residences, [located here](#). The Department of Aging and Community Living's Safe at Home program, offered to residents to increase home safety, has been increasingly popular. We look forward to results of a long-term study to see if, on average, Safe at Home participants have been able to age in place longer than others whose homes have not been modified with stairs risers, grab bars in bathrooms and other Safe at Home modifications.

In closing, your oversight of the Age-Friendly DC Task Force work is appreciated. As always, we strive to operate with complete transparency, and will ensure that the communication channels with your staff remain open and productive. We look forward to working with you in the future. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

