

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



Fiscal Year 2024-2025
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Charon P.W. Hines
Director

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

Thursday, February 27, 2025

9:30 AM

Good morning, Chairperson Bonds, members of the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor, and Committee staff. My name is Charon P.W. Hines, and I am the Director of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL). It is an honor to testify before you today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser to share the agency's performance during Fiscal Year 2024 and our vision for the year ahead. Accompanying me today are Angela Richardson, DACL's Chief of Staff, and Melanie Johnson, DACL's Chief Program Officer.

I want to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to Mayor Bowser for her steadfast leadership and service to our city's seniors, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers. She remains committed to every resident having the resources and support necessary to thrive, shaping our work at DACL, and I am grateful to be part of an administration that prioritizes the needs of our oldest residents. I also want to extend my appreciation to the incredible team at DACL and our Senior Service Network. Their dedicated efforts provide our seniors with the highest level of care and support every day, and for that, I am thankful. And, of course, I must recognize the seniors of the District of Columbia. They are the foundation of our communities, and their voices, experiences, and advocacy drive the work that we do. At DACL, we often say, **"For without the seniors, there is no us."** It is because of them that we continue to push forward, ensuring they can age with dignity, independence, and joy.

The mission of the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL) 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 effectively leverage resources.

As I entered my second year as Director, I reflected on three core areas that have defined our agency's progress: **1. strengthening relationships with our sister agencies; 2. streamlining resources to enhance efficiency and customer satisfaction; 3. and improving the overall well-being of our seniors so they are empowered to Live Boldly in the District of Columbia.**

One of the most significant ways we have maximized our impact is through deepening our partnerships with sister agencies. The responsibility of caring for our city's older adults is not DACL's alone – it is a shared priority across government. Through our work with DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS), seniors have received critical fire safety education and emergency response support, reducing risks in their homes.

Our collaboration with the Department of Disability Services (DDS) and the DC Developmental Disabilities Council has streamlined the resources available to residents with disabilities, providing the care and support they need. As a member of the DC Developmental Disabilities Council, I am further building my capacity in this space, recently participating in our annual retreat to learn new ways to provide greater support for adults with disabilities in the District.

With the Department of General Services (DGS), we have addressed maintenance and work order concerns across our wellness centers, creating safer and more welcoming spaces for seniors to gather, connect, and engage. Our partnership with the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) has allowed us to better respond to emergency situations involving seniors, delivering timely assistance during crises. Additionally, Serve DC has worked alongside us to mobilize volunteers who provide direct assistance to seniors, including the most recent Snow Heroes activation, which helped clear pathways for hundreds of seniors during the most recent winter snow emergency.

Our collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has expanded support for older adults through the Single-Family Residential Rehab Program, which helps senior homeowners in the District repair their homes, including roof replacements and accessibility modifications. Furthermore, DHCD's Heirs Property Assistance Program assists seniors and their families in maintaining their homes, ensuring their legacies remain within families for future generations.

Lastly, our partnership with the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) has allowed us to meet the needs of older adults residing in DCHA properties, making sure they have access to nutritious meals and supportive services that enhance their quality of life.

Our long-standing partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) remains a cornerstone of our efforts to combat social isolation among seniors. Together, we have

expanded DACL dining programs at recreation centers across the city, ensuring older adults have access to nutritious meals in welcoming, social environments. Additionally, we continue to collaborate on citywide events like Senior Fest and our newest event, Red, White, and You, bringing together thousands of seniors for meaningful engagement and celebration.

As we continue to prioritize streamlining resources, we have made strategic changes to improve efficiency and service delivery. We have integrated the Medicaid Enrollment Services unit under the Clinical Services Officer Cluster to enhance coordination and maintain continuity of care for seniors, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers. This alignment allows us to better navigate Medicaid-related challenges and provide more seamless support. Additionally, we have restructured our Lead Agencies to improve service delivery across all eight wards. Iona Senior Services now serves as the lead agency for Ward 4, in addition to Ward 2 and Ward 3, while East River Family Strengthening Collaborative has taken on Ward 1, while continuing to serve Wards 7 and Ward 8. Seabury Resources for Aging remains the lead agency for Ward 5 and Ward 6. My team and I meet regularly with our lead agency directors to ensure that efficiency, effectiveness, and high-quality service remain at the core of their work.

Nutrition remains one of the most pressing concerns for older adults, and we are committed to continuously enhancing our programs to meet this fundamental need. Our food programs remain a critical resource for our seniors, and in Fiscal Year 2024, we came closer than ever to serving one million meals. Through our various nutrition programs, DACL provided just under 930,000 meals to seniors across the District, providing access to nutritious and culturally relevant food. The introduction of a new DC-based food vendor, Ocean Pro, brought increased

satisfaction among seniors, complementing our existing partnership with Dutch Mill. Now, seniors in all eight wards are receiving high-quality, nutritious meals that support their overall health and well-being. In partnership with DC Health, for more than seven years, DACL has continued to support the feeding of 5,700 seniors through the Grocery Plus program. Nutrition remains one of the most pressing concerns for older adults, and we are committed to continuously enhancing our programs to meet this fundamental need.

Beyond nutrition, our efforts to enhance the well-being of seniors have extended to specialized programs that address memory loss and caregiving support. In FY24, we provided essential services to just under 2,000 seniors and their caregivers navigating the challenges of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD).

Our Citywide Money Management Program (MMP) assists older adults with cognitive impairments in managing their bills, promoting financial stability and reducing the risk of exploitation.

Our Dementia Navigators provide hands-on support, connecting families with critical resources and offering guidance on managing behavioral symptoms. Additionally, our Caregiver Support Programs offer vital respite and wellness activities, including meditation sessions that promote caregiver resilience.

Club Memory, a stigma-free space for those in the early stages of dementia and their caregivers, continues to foster community and connection, hosted at senior wellness centers and

faith-based organizations throughout the District. As part of our efforts to expand these vital services, we are in the final stages of recruiting a Dementia Coordinator to enhance support for individuals with dementia and their caregivers.

DACL's commitment to engagement and outreach remains stronger than ever. In FY24, we hosted close to 300 community events, a nearly 6% increase from FY23, reaching close to 70,000 residents across the city. These events provide valuable opportunities to hear directly from seniors about their needs and concerns, allowing us to tailor our services accordingly. Our network of more than 20 Senior Ambassadors plays a crucial role in disseminating information about our programs, making certain that resources reach seniors in every ward.

Additionally, our Adult Protective Services (APS) division continues to be a lifeline for vulnerable older adults experiencing abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation. In FY24, APS received over 2,200 referrals, a 4% increase from FY23, and conducted nearly 1,200 investigations, providing timely intervention for those at risk. Our expanded outreach efforts have included National Scam Awareness Day Roundtables in all eight wards in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), equipping seniors with the knowledge to protect themselves from financial fraud. Elder abuse prevention also remained a focal point at Mayor Bowser's 13th Annual Senior Symposium, where seniors received critical information on recognizing and reporting abuse.

The Safe at Home program, Mayor Bowser's signature initiative for seniors, continues to be a transformative force in helping older adults live and thrive in the communities they know

and love. In FY24, the program served over 800 residents, providing in-home modifications such as grab bars, handrails, bathtub cutouts, and stair lifts. Since its inception, Safe at Home has contributed to making over 7,300 households safer, allowing seniors to remain in their homes with dignity and independence.

Madam Chair, as you can see, the work we do at DACL is deeply rooted in the belief that every senior in the District should have the opportunity to age with security, support, and respect. Our accomplishments in FY24 reflect our steadfast dedication to this mission, but we know there is always more to do. As we look ahead to FY25, we remain laser-focused on strengthening partnerships, enhancing service delivery, and making sure that all seniors in the District have access to the resources they need to **Live Boldly**. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.