

Testimony on District of Columbia Office on Aging Oversight
Before the District of Columbia City Council
Committee on Housing and Community Development
Chairperson Anita Bonds
February 12, 2015

Presented by
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GOOD MORNING/AFTERNOON COUNCILMEMBER BONDS. I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU TODAY. MY NAME IS JUDITH LEVY AND I AM COORDINATOR OF THE DC COALITION ON LONG TERM CARE, WHICH MEETS MONTHLY TO ADDRESS ISSUES AND PROBLEMS FACED BY THE DISTRICT'S NETWORK OF AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES.

TODAY, I WANT TO DISCUSS ISSUES WITH THE DISTRICT'S ELDERLY AND PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES WAIVER PROGRAM. KNOWN AS THE EPD WAIVER, THIS PROGRAM IS A VITAL LIFELINE THAT ENABLES OUR CITY'S MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES RATHER THAN BE INSTITUTIONALIZED IN A NURSING FACILITY. THE EPD WAIVER PROGRAM PROVIDES UP TO 16 HOURS PER DAY OF IN-HOME CARE FOR RESIDENTS WHO ARE NOT POOR ENOUGH TO QUALIFY FOR MEDICAID SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RICH ENOUGH TO AFFORD TO PAY A PRIVATE HOME HEALTH AIDE THE GOING RATE OF \$20 PER HOUR. THE PROGRAM SERVES INDIVIDUALS WHOSE INCOME IS BETWEEN \$980 PER MONTH AND \$2,199 PER MONTH. THIS PROGRAM IS AN IMPORTANT SAFETY NET FOR OUR MOST FRAIL CITIZENS, WHOSE SAFETY DEPENDS ON HAVING SOMEONE IN THEIR HOME TO HELP THEM WITH BATHING, COOKING AND

DRESSING.

MANAGEMENT OF THE EPD WAIVER PROGRAM REMAINS A MYSTERY EVEN TO THOSE OF US IN THE AGING NETWORK WHO HAVE WORKED WITH IT FOR YEARS. THE MOST MYSTERIOUS ISSUE IS WHY THE PROGRAM HAS MAINTAINED A VACANCY RATE OF ABOUT 33 PERCENT FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS. THAT AMOUNTS TO AN AVERAGE OF 1,400 OF THE DISTRICT'S MOST VULNERABLE RESIDENTS WHO ARE NOT GETTING THE HELP THEY NEED IN THEIR HOMES. AND THAT VACANCY RATE HAS BEEN MAINTAINED DESPITE THE FACT THAT 70 CENTS OF EVERY DOLLAR IN COST FOR THE PROGRAM IS PAID BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

I AM BRINGING THE EPD WAIVER PROGRAM TO YOUR ATTENTION BECAUSE YOU HAVE OVERSIGHT OVER PART OF IT AS CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. THE AGING AND DISABILITIES RESOURCE CENTER – A BRANCH OF THE DC OFFICE ON AGING – IS THE ENTRY POINT FOR RESIDENTS WHO APPLY FOR HOME HEALTH SERVICES UNDER THE WAIVER. ADRC OFFICIALS TAKE A DISTRICT RESIDENT'S INFORMATION AND – AFTER A WAIT – ASK THEM TO CHOOSE THREE HOME HEALTH AGENCIES TO ASSIST THEM WITH THEIR WAIVER APPLICATION. THIS PROCESS IS CONFUSING TO RESIDENTS, WHO ARE MOSTLY ELDERLY, IN POOR HEALTH, AND DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY OF THE AGENCIES THEY ARE BEING ASKED TO SELECT FROM. A CASE MANAGER THEN MEETS WITH THE RESIDENT TO FILL OUT THE COMPLEX APPLICATION FORM.

ONCE A RESIDENT'S APPLICATION IS FILED WITH THE ADRC, IT GOES TO THE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CARE FINANCE FOR THE NEXT STEP IN THE PROCESS.

HEALTH CARE FINANCE HAS CONTRACTED WITH TWO COMPANIES – DELMARVA AND QUALLIS – TO MEET AGAIN WITH THE RESIDENT AND VERIFY INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT WOULD JUSTIFY SENDING A HOME HEALTH AIDE TO HELP THEM.

MEANWHILE, THE RESIDENT’S FINANCIAL INFORMATION HAS BEEN SENT TO THE ECONOMIC SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (ESA) IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES. ESA IS TASKED WITH MAKING SURE APPLICANTS AREN’T OVER THE INCOME LIMIT OF 2,199 DOLLARS PER MONTH, WHICH WOULD DISQUALIFY THEM.

SO, EACH APPLICATION FOR EPD WAIVER SERVICES IS EXAMINED BY THREE DIFFERENT AGENCIES AND TWO PRIVATE CONTRACTING FIRMS. NO WONDER RESIDENTS ARE CONFUSED. NO WONDER THAT IT TAKES THREE MONTHS – AND OFTEN LONGER – FOR A RESIDENT TO HAVE A HOME HEALTH AIDE ASSIGNED TO HER AFTER FIRST APPLYING FOR THE PROGRAM. IN FACT, THREE DIFFERENT MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL HAVE OVERSIGHT OVER THIS FRACTURED PROGRAM.

COUNCILMEMBER BONDS, THE LONG TERM CARE COALITION REQUESTS THAT YOU CONFER WITH COUNCILMEMBER ALEXANDER – WHO HAS OVERSIGHT OVER THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CARE FINANCE – TO SUPPORT DEVELOPING A COORDINATED APPROACH ON THE COUNCIL LEVEL TO THE MANY PROBLEMS WITH THE EPD WAIVER PROGRAM. THIS PROGRAM IS TOO VITAL AND TOO IMPORTANT TO THE DISTRICT’S MOST FRAIL RESIDENTS FOR THE PROBLEMS TO CONTINUE.

