

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

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Presented by

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Good morning Councilmember Bond and members of the Committee on Housing and Community Development. My name is Sally White. I am the Executive Director of Iona Senior Services and Co-Chair of the DC Senior Advisory Coalition.

Iona has been a Lead Agency for the DC Office on Aging since 1982 and a founding member of the DC Senior Advisory Coalition made up of over 30 organizations advocating for and with older adults in the District of Columbia. Last year at this time I testified about how, after more than a decade of decreasing support shredded the safety net of services for older adults in many sections of the District, the infusion of funds in FY14 began to turn the tide and rebuild that network. We are very grateful for DCOA's support, especially at Iona for the increased support in FY14, but we are concerned that the network of service providers is being overwhelmed by the needs in the community. We need ongoing and working dialogue with the Office on Aging to develop new and creative solutions to many challenges. I'd like to describe a few of the successes and challenges here:

Additional social work support: The addition of new social workers to the staff of each lead agency in FY14 has increased a critical support for older adults with multiple, complicated psychosocial, health and nutrition needs. At Iona alone, we saw an 18% increase in the number of clients served through case management and assessment in FY14 as compared to FY13. Providing case management keeps older adults living in their homes. It improves access to health care, reduces isolation and much more. For less than \$20,000 per year, we can provide case management and other services such as home delivered meals to a frail, at risk older adult and by doing so we can keep them living in the community rather than going into a nursing home. If the average nursing home costs \$110,000 per year we save the District and Federal

Governments up to \$90,000 per year for each very vulnerable person we serve. Last year at this time, thanks to the infusion of funds for case managers, we were able to eliminate our case management waiting list. But the needs continue to grow and we now once again have a wait list for this critical service; a service that is also very important to those individuals who the Office on Aging is helping to move back into the community from nursing homes.

Home delivered meals: Thanks in large part to increased support included in the FY14 budget at the behest of Councilmember Marion Barry, the number of individuals provided with home delivered meals has increased dramatically, from X to X. Unfortunately, the need is so great that the waiting list is growing again and is now at over 300 people citywide. Along with the need for more meals comes a significant need for additional meal coordinators and nutritionists to manage the services and provide critical nutrition assessments, counseling and education. Many nutritionists in the lead agencies are too busy managing congregate lunch programs to spend the time needed for these priority services.

Wellness Centers: The Office on Aging has expanded service hours and weekend service through for the six existing Wellness Centers in the District. We look forward to hearing from the service providers and DCOA about how the funds are being expended and the added value of these dollars. We have also proposed the establishment of a Wellness Alliance for Wards 2 and 3 which would not be dependent on a dedicated Wellness Center and urge DCOA to support a feasibility study for this request.

Nutrition Sites: As Dr. Thompson knows, while the need for affordable and nutritious food continues to grow, the model for delivering congregate meals is severely outdated and underresourced. In the coming year, we hope to work with the Office on Aging to look at new models of meal delivery to those older residents who can come out and participate in a group setting.

The WEHTS transportation system has been transformed into the Seabury Connector Service:

Communication, Collaboration and transparency: We urge the Office on Aging to look upon grantee agencies as true community partners dedicated to the same goals of meeting the needs of each and every older adult in the District. I know that Iona and other grantee agencies would benefit from more face-to-face time with Dr. Thompson himself to problems solve challenges together. We want to encourage the Office on Aging to increase two-way communication with community partners further through email, phone and in-person meetings as we work to address the many challenges ahead.

Aging and Disability Resource Center: The work of the ADRC is improving rapidly under the leadership of Sara Tribe and her team. This Center is going to be playing an increasing critical

role as the access point for the Medicaid Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (EPD) Waiver and other Health Care Finance programs serving older adults. The District needs consumer friendly processes for DC residents in need of these vital services.

Increased Awareness of the policy issues relating to Older Adults - their needs, their opportunities, their value to our city: With increased advocacy and the Age Friendly Cities initiative, we believe DC can be a model place for growing old. The Senior Advisory Coalition is especially intent on seeing that seniors throughout the city and seniors of all income levels benefit from this attention. Since the DC Office on Aging shares this mission, we count on their resources and leadership to champion the value of the unique public-private partnership that has existed since enactment of the DC Act on Aging in 1974.

Budget: In FY14, The Office on Aging worked with a consultant to do an actuarial study of the reimbursement rates for services provided by grantee agencies. We will be back for the budget hearing to testify for the need to increase the budget so that there is more adequate funding available to provide quality services and meet increased demand.

We know that the Council and the Mayor's team face some difficult budget decisions in the weeks and months ahead. We urge the Council to protect the funding for services for vulnerable older adults in the District and work with us and the Office on Aging to increase support and creative service delivery for the older residents of the District.