

February 10, 2016

Testimony of Randolph Smith, LICSW, social work case manager, Iona Senior Services, Ward 3
Before the Honorable Yvette M. Alexander, Chairperson, D.C. City Council Committee on Health and Human Services

Councilmember Alexander, thank you for holding this hearing and granting me the opportunity to speak to you about the EPD Waiver program. My name is Randy Smith and I am a social worker at Iona Senior Services in Ward 3.

Seniors I assist usually live by themselves, have no family to help them, and have only enough money to pay their rent and to buy food. For these seniors, the EPD Waiver program is a vital lifeline, providing the help they need to remain independent and safe in their homes.

However, over the past five years, we have consistently faced great obstacles and long delays in obtaining home help through the EPD Waiver program. In fact, the obstacles in enrolling seniors in this program have gotten progressively worse in the last five years.

Back in the summer of 2011, the Department of Health Care Finance froze the program and created a Wait List. That Wait List was not officially suspended until March 2014, but it created huge vacancy rates in the EPD Waiver program. An analysis of Health Care Finances' own enrollment figures show a steady rise in vacant Waiver positions growing from 7% at the end of 2011 to nearly 40% as of last August. That's 1,700 frail and vulnerable District residents who are **not** getting the help they need to remain safe in their homes. That shocking figure pops out when the Waiver program's actual enrollment is compared to its program capacity, as reported to the federal government.

That vacancy rate has always mystified me because 70 cents out of every \$1 spent on Waiver services is federal money. Madam Chair, why are 1,700 frail and isolated seniors left to languish with no help at home when the capacity exists to provide them with a home health aide to help bathe them, cook for them, or do their laundry?

One reason may lie in how complicated and bureaucratic Health Care Finance has made the EPD Waiver program. Three different city departments administer different parts of the program. In addition, the city pays two contractors to qualify people for Waiver services. Given this cumbersome complexity and all of these different administrators, is it any wonder that the District's seniors often wait 6 to 12 months after they apply before a Waiver home health aide actually comes into their home?

Last August, I assisted a 90-year-old woman with multiple health issues apply for EPD Waiver help. Now, it's February and there still is no word on when an aide will start actually working in her

home. In fact, the official enrollment interview did not happen until November – three months after her name was submitted to the city.

The witness who was supposed to follow me – Mr. Leroy Holland – regrets that he could not be here to testify because he is being fitted for a prosthetic leg. A retired District and federal employee, Mr. Holland lost his left leg below the knee in September due to complications from diabetes. While Mr. Holland was recovering at National Rehabilitation Hospital, the staff there applied for him to be enrolled in the EPD Waiver program so he would have help when he was discharged home. In mid-October, he was approved for a home health aide to assist him 14 hours a day, 7 days a week.

But when he was sent home one week later, there was no help because Mr. Holland's case got lost in the bureaucracy of the EPD Waiver program. Mr. Holland survived on his own the best he could through the month of November. In early December, he called the city for help and Iona finally was contacted.

It took repeated telephone calls to Health Care Finance and to multiple home care agencies throughout December for me to untangle this bureaucratic maze and finally get Mr. Holland a home health aide through a related program. The aide began work on January 5th – 2½ months after he left National Rehabilitation Hospital. And Mr. Holland ultimately got an aide through the Medicaid State Plan for 5 days a week because that program usually provides help much faster than the EPD Waiver.

Madam Chair, someone should be held responsible for this continuing travesty. We have been told that Health Care Finance is trying to fix the problems, but we have not seen any improvements to date. The EPD Waiver program has been broken for far too long and the District's seniors need the City Council's intervention to fix it.