

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



Fiscal Year 2021 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services

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

February 26, 2021, 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 activities and accomplishments of the Age-Friendly DC Task Force in Fiscal Year 2020 and FY 2021 to date.

You will remember that the Age-Friendly Communities global initiative was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) to inspire cities to focus on improving access to the physical and social environments in which we live our lives. The initiative is intended to promote changes that can have an impact on lifelong aging. At its core, Age Friendly has three key philosophies that seek to promote such changes by:

- Combating the effects of ageism;
- Fostering lifelong respect for all residents; and
- Supporting healthy and fulfilling aging throughout life.

You may remember that the Age-Friendly program was brought to DC in 2012. Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Bowser, who continues to forge new and greater pathways to prosperity for residents at every stage of life, Age-Friendly DC has experienced significant growth over the past few years.

The success of Age-Friendly DC hinges on our ability to strike a deeper understanding of lifelong aging across government and the community. We all must address our own healthy



aging together with others in the city. As residents of DC, each of us should be mindful of how our community is built for and shared by residents and visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Recognition of shared experiences is why Age-Friendly DC is co-led by District government agencies across every cluster along with community partners and stakeholders

Residents of all ages, District government employees, and community partners collectively made measurable progress implementing the goals of the 2014-2017 Age Friendly Strategic Plan, including:

- ✓ DC's block-by-block walk which led to the DC Department of Transportation's focus on walkability and pedestrian safety.
- ✓ DC's Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), Services My Way, and affordable assisted living, which together allow qualified frail residents in need of assistance, choices on places to live other than nursing homes.
- ✓ More attention to the value an intergenerational workforce, including workers 50 and over.
- ✓ More programming in multiple agencies to include the growing population of older residents, resulting in less age-segregated, more intergenerational-focused reasons to get up in the morning to do good for others.
- ✓ More inclusion of experienced residents in emergency planning, resulting in training older and disabled neighborhood as organizers.
- ✓ Increased awareness that home modifications for safety are essential to saving lives, resulting in the very popular Safe at Home program.



✓ Funding for Neighborhood Villages, building awareness that neighbor-to-neighbor support is valued by all.

✓ More direct service providers providing LGBTQ cultural competency training.

With its 2017 report on its five years of progress, DC moved to the forefront of the Age-Friendly worldwide network when WHO recognized Mayor Bowser and the District of Columbia as a national and global leader in the network of Age-Friendly Cities.

In addition to highlighting the strategic plan, I would like to emphasize the importance of the Age-Friendly DC Task Force. In 2018 Mayor Bowser appointed the current Age-Friendly DC 2023 Task Force which utilized focus groups and survey responses from the Livability Survey to ground their work. That Fall Mayor Bowser and the Age-Friendly Task Force released the 2023 Age-Friendly Strategic Plan, which 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: the 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 128 community organizations. With the Committee of Housing and Executive Administration questions, you have offered the Age-Friendly DC Task Force the opportunity to shed light on the [Age-Friendly DC Two-Year Progress Report](#), which was recently released by Mayor Bowser in January 2021. You will see the work of all fourteen Age-Friendly DC domains that relate to one of the three Pillars. Under the tab “Acronyms” in that Report, you will see the names and contact information for all the DC agencies and community organizations who are working on



Age-Friendly DC goals and strategies with the overall aim to make the District an even easier city in which to live, work and play.

Face-to-face meetings that in the past have welcomed participants from across DC were held virtually in 2020 due to the pandemic. The focus at meetings was on equity, the backbone of the Age-Friendly initiative worldwide, and on immediate next steps for helping residents across DC to stay healthy, engaged, and able to find fulfilling purposes for getting up in the morning.

Thanks to our many partnering organizations, virtual meetings drew more participants from all areas of the city because travel to meetings was not an obstacle. Moving forward virtual options for attending meetings will always be offered.

I want to spend a few minutes of the time I have here today highlighting a few of the Age Friendly DC areas that have really shone bright over the last year, including access to technology, food, employment, and safety.

The public health emergency has helped us focus on the importance of technological competency for all ages. Increasing awareness of where to obtain training, equipment, and connectivity has always been a part of the Age-Friendly DC 2023 Strategic Plan, but the public health emergency brought this goal to the forefront of our minds. As we grow older, from childhood to our growing population of centenarians, we have to keep up. 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 all making a difference with tech individual tutoring and tech classes. Thanks for taking us, students of all ages: parents, grandparents, and great grandparents on a speedy learning curve and creating increasing access to computers and connectivity. The gap is filling. We all want to see family and friends and stay involved with our communities. We know that social 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 meetings last spring and fall reinforced the importance of inclusion to implement the goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly DC 2023 Strategic Plan.

I would also like to extend appreciation to DC Health, the Department of Aging and Community Living, the Department of For-Hire Vehicles, Capital Area Food Bank, DC Hunger Solutions, DC Greens, the DC Food Policy Council and many, many community partners for increasing access to food and meal sources. Access to nutritional resources has been more important than ever over this past year.

Age-Friendly DC is proud of the work increasing employment opportunities for all adults including active residents 50 and over, through lifelong education offered by DOES, DC's charter schools and private school partners, particularly for part time in-home and institutional long-term care of other older adults. We know the easiest way for qualifying adults to obtain a computer and connectivity is to sign up for adult classes offered by charter schools.

Before and after pandemic restrictions were imposed, we are glad that much has been done in the District to promote lifelong financial planning and prosecutions to thwart abuse, neglect, and



scams resulting in undue influence on trusting adults. Age Friendly DC will continue to keep this at the forefront of our work.

Age-Friendly DC sees the home adaptation projects completed with funding from the Department of Aging and Community Living's Safe at Home program, as saving lives. We look forward to results of a study to see if, on average, Safe at Home participants are able to age in the community longer than others whose homes have not been modified with stair risers, grab bars in bathrooms and other Safe at Home modifications.

In closing, thank you for your support of the 2023 Age-Friendly DC Task Force. As always, we strive to show evidence of progress with participating DC agency key performance indicators and by shining light on the Age-Friendly work of DC universities, health systems, businesses, faith-based organizations, wellness centers and neighborhood villages. We will ensure that the communication channels with your staff remain open and productive. We hope you will attend one or more of the [Age-Friendly DC Task Force domain meetings in March and April](#), intended to prepare progress reports for the next [Age-Friendly DC Task Force meeting May 18 from 1-3](#). We look forward to working with you in the future. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

