



## Protect the District's FY2025 Senior Budget!

Dear Gene,

This week, AARP DC took ACTION and now it's your turn! On February 12th, AARP DC called on the Mayor and the Department on Aging and Community Living (DACL) to fulfill its promise of an Age-Friendly DC by preventing budget cuts and filling service gaps for essential senior support services.

Join us in calling on the Mayor to support older adults across the District. Click the link below to send your own

letter, sharing the following priorities:

### **Caregiving and In-Home Support Services**

Home Care Partners is an established non-profit agency providing three major programs with DACL funding. These include (1) the Homemaker Program which helps clients manage their daily routines in the home; (2) the DC Caregiver Institute providing respite and monthly reimbursements for caring expenses; and (3) the Safe at Home Program providing in-home adaptations to reduce the risk of falls for DC residents.

In FY2024, there is already an existing \$400,000 budget shortfall for the Homemaker Program. This has resulted in closing the program to new applicants and an anticipated reduction in services. Clients whose services are reduced face risk of institutionalization as they are frailer and aging through the program. Cuts mean risk to their ability to age at home and consequently, premature institutionalization.

- **To prevent further reduction in services due to an already existing \$400,000 budget shortfall, AARP urged DACL and the Mayor to retain the program's FY2024 funding levels in FY2025. This includes maintaining \$2 million in DACL local funds and \$350,000 in federal dollars.**

The DC Caregivers Institute's (DCCI) FY2024 budget of \$920,000 is also facing a \$100,000 shortfall. With rising operating costs, updated salary demands of the social work and nursing industries, along with increased caregiver needs; the program is faced with some tough

decisions. This includes reducing the 16 hours of caregiver respite relief allotted each month, along with cuts to the \$600 monthly flex account reimbursement. Caregivers rely on these funds to offset the cost of their unpaid labor, lost wages, and care expenses. Data from AARP's Public Policy Institute report shows there are over 78,000 caregivers in the District. Their unpaid labor offsets the cost to the District by \$1.37 billion annually. It is only fair to support the few that benefit from this essential program.

- **AARP DC urged DACL and the Mayor to utilize all available funding to maintain service levels for DCCI's Caregiver Respite and Flex Account Programs. This includes preventing any cuts to the program budgets in FY2025 and filling the \$100,000 shortfall. This will ensure caregivers can receive at least 16 hours of respite per month and the \$600 flex account reimbursement to offset the financial burden caregiving.**

In addition to caregiving supports to age in place, a recent AARP survey of older adults shows 79% report they will need bathroom modifications including grab bars or no-step showers. Over 60% said they will need an emergency response system, and 48% will need smart-home devices, such as a voice activated home assistant or a doorbell camera. DACL's popular Safe at Home program has been a step in the right direction for seniors needing these supports.

- **AARP urged DACL and the Mayor to reject any proposed cuts to the in-demand Safe at Home**

**Program. This includes preserving Safe at Home 1.0's \$4.4 million budget that provides up to \$7,000 in home modifications, and the \$219,000 allotted to Safe at Home 2.0 for evidence-based falls prevention programming. Where funds are available, the Mayor should begin increasing the Safe at Home budget to meet increasing demand, increasing costs, and to address the growing backlog of applications.**

Furthermore, DACL was encouraged to work closely with Home Care Partners, one of the District's most trusted providers, to identify programmatic solutions to the program's backlog. In FY2023, approved applications for home modifications were halted by May 2023 and on hold until FY2024 funds were released. For many, modifications are still waiting completion. This issue will continue to grow in FY2025 unless additional funds are identified.

### **Senior Villages**

Senior Villages are quickly proving to be an essential lifeline to older adults and a cost savings to the District's budget. AARP is happy to learn of DACL's commitment to secure equal funding for all 13 villages in FY2025. According to the 2022 DC Village Impact Report, DC Villages provide over 27,000 hours of unpaid service for elder Washingtonians within a 12-month period totaling \$1.59 million in value. This included 5,000 medical and recreational rides, 1,800 grocery deliveries, 3,974 socialization events, 12,069 friendly visits, high intensity support to over 600 older adults, and a host of other services.

- **AARP DC urged the DACL and the Mayor to maintain the commitment from the FY2023-2024 Performance Oversight Hearing in FY2025. This includes \$650,000 divided evenly between 13 D.C. Villages, the current \$154,000 for other direct expenses, \$38,000 for personnel, and \$5,000 for administrative costs. The current \$46,000 in funding for Capitol Hill Village's LGBTQ programming should also continue into FY2025. This, along with an equity needs assessment for chapters in underserved and low-income neighborhoods should be initiated.**

### **Hispanic/Latino Senior Services**

During DACL's recent Performance Oversight Hearing, VIDA Senior Services reported a \$60,000 cut in funds to their FY2024 grant award. As the only DACL funded program serving primarily Spanish speaking older adults from Mexico and 20 countries of Central and South America, these cuts are unacceptable and jeopardize the organization's services (i.e., meals, food commodities, health screenings, social services, nutritional counseling and guidance, mental health support, and recreational activities). FY2024 cuts resulted in a 13% decrease to DACL programming and a reduction of staffing (40 hours to 25 hours per week).