

Testimony of Sally White

Case #: 20-06

Hello, my name is Sally White and I am Executive Director of Iona Senior Services here in Washington DC. I recommend the Committee make support for this PUD contingent on an increase in the number of “meaningful public benefits,” including funding for the Friends of Capitol Hill Adult Day Center.

I’d like to speak briefly about the value and benefits of adult day health care. Adult day health programs are the “hidden gem” in community-based support for older adults who are no longer completely independent. Because of physical and/or cognitive challenges, many people stop participating in activities that used to bring them joy, enrich their lives, and make them feel part of a larger community. Some individuals can no longer leave their homes—much less take public transportation—due to difficulties with walking and/or memory loss. They may have dementia, Parkinson’s, brittle diabetes, or have had a stroke. At home, alone or with an over-stressed caregiver, they wither away with nothing to fill their days but TV watching and doctor appointments. Others manage to get out of the house, but have nowhere to go, literally hanging out on street corners with their walkers because they cannot participate in the senior wellness center programming that was so central to their lives in the past.

Since 1986, Iona has welcomed older adults with Alzheimer’s, other forms of dementia, physical challenges, and intellectual disabilities to our adult day health program, in Tenleytown. Through our programming, which focuses on well-being and creativity, we lift spirits, build confidence, and stimulate cognitive functioning. At the same time, our approach reduces depression, hospitalizations and nursing home placements. Started with the urging and financial support of the DC Office on Aging in 1986, Iona’s Center provides older family members a reason to get up in the morning, enjoy activities, and make new friends, while under the care of skilled and compassionate staff and volunteers. At the same time, caregivers find peace of mind and much-needed respite from caregiving, allowing them to go to work, handle personal business, or take a break knowing their relative is safe and well cared for. This, in turn, give the caregivers renewed energy to care for their family members, who can continue to live at home. Fun activities, art therapy, and friends to have lunch and laugh with — all of this can be found in our spacious and cheerful center, open Monday through Friday in Tenleytown. Next month, Iona will be opening a new program in Ward 8’s Congress Heights neighborhood, but no such program exists to serve the residents of Capitol Hill.

The Need

In the last decade, the number of Washingtonians over age 60 increased by nearly 15,000 to 117,223. According to the DC State Plan on Alzheimer's¹, one in 10 persons over the age of 65, and nearly half of those over the age of 85, have Alzheimer's disease. Approximately 9 percent of the District of Columbia's senior population, 8,900 people, have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (Alzheimer's Association, 2019)². Care for these individuals largely falls on the family. Family caregivers accounted for \$368 million of unpaid services to loved ones in 2012 in the District of Columbia (Alzheimer's Association, 2013).

Impact

The impact of this program for Capitol Hill will be profound, in both the short and long term. In addition to improving the quality of life for the participants, when recently surveyed, almost half of the families served in our current center said that the adult day health program has delayed or replaced institutionalization for their family member. Many, if not most, of our participants never enter a residential facility, or only do so at the very end of life, and are able to continue living their lives at home. This is not only their preference, it also saves the District and Federal Government an estimated \$86,000 per senior, per year over nursing facility costs.

¹ *The District of Columbia State Plan on Alzheimer's Disease*, 2014-2019, DC Office on Aging

² <https://alz.org/getmedia/939b2678-6025-4fa7-af89-da9e37ca91d8/dc-alzheimers-facts-figures-2019>