

# 2024 DC Advocacy Day

## ABOUT LEADINGAGE

- We represent more than 5,000 mission-driven organizations who serve millions of older adults and families across the aging services continuum.
- We are the trusted voice for aging and envision an America That Values Older Adults And Those Who Serve Them.
- We are a catalyst for innovation and work with practitioners and policymakers to develop new ways to improve operations and quality of service.
- We are steadfast in our efforts to build an equitable and inclusive aging services community.

## LEADINGAGE DC ADVOCACY DAY 2024

### LeadingAge DC's advocacy strives to make DC a better place to age well

Mayor Bowser's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget reflects tight budget constraints and difficult decisions about where to direct finite resources. Unfortunately, it falls short of expectations that the District will make critical investments to the aging services continuum of care, in step with the current and projected needs of the growing population of aging residents.

DC needs thousands of new direct care professionals, as well as strategies to retain experienced workers, to meet the growing demand of an aging population.

Direct care professionals, or direct care workers (DCWs), are Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) and Home Health Aides (HHAs) who care for elders or adults and children with chronic conditions and disabilities.

### Mayor Bowser's Proposed FY 25 Budget

The proposed budget does not include funding to address the wage gap for the direct care professional workforce, to reduce training and licensure costs, or to improve opportunities for these workers to build their careers by earning advanced credentials.

Additionally, we are concerned about the following proposed budget cuts:

- In the DACL Budget: The proposed FY 25 funding levels for In-home services falls short of FY 23 actual expenditures, at a time when demand for services is increasing.
- Workforce Investment: The proposed FY 25 budget of \$103.2K is 50% less than the FY 24 proposed budget of \$206.5K. There appear to be no investments in training for direct care workers, the highest demand, highest need health jobs in the District.
- Pay Equity Fund: In eliminating \$70 million in funding supporting higher wages for child care workers, the Mayor noted the lack of investment in professional caregivers. This is the wrong approach - it is imperative to ensure that all care workers can earn a livable wage and if they choose, advance their careers through career ladders.

## The Direct Care Workforce Crisis

The crisis in recruiting and retaining frontline and professional aging services workers is not new, but the impacts of the pandemic made it even more essential that policy-makers create and fund programs that recruit and train workers in our field.

- Workers are leaving the direct care workforce because wages are not competitive with jobs that have similar or lower entry level requirements
- In 2023 alone, the eldercare workforce shrunk by an additional 4,489 workers - a reduction of 30 percent compared to 2022.

This crisis threatens the security of mission-driven long-term care providers, many of whom are a safety net for aging residents.

- Due to this strain on staffing, providers must pay more to attract and retain labor
- Many providers are faced with a need to reduce services and/or admissions as a result
- DC is not training enough workers to replace those who have left, and the gap between need and demand for services continues to grow.

The impact on seniors, people with disabilities and their families is devastating.

- Home-bound seniors are unable to complete the tasks of daily living when aides are unavailable
- Family members are burdened with the added stress of managing their loved one's care, often taking time away from work and incurring lost wages

And the professional caregivers that serve residents who need help to maintain their quality of life, find their own quality of life diminished

- The renewal process for CNA and HHA licenses are a financial and administrative burden and in some cases, cannot be completed without help from an employer
- Direct care professionals often:
  - work multiple jobs to make ends meet,
  - rely on social safety net programs to augment their wages, and
  - cannot afford to live in the District

The District must invest in the aging services continuum of care and advance financial security and economic mobility for this critical workforce.

## The Direct Care Worker Amendment Act

We support the Direct Care Worker Amendment Act (DCWAA). Rectifying historic disinvestment in our professional caregiving workforce provides an opportunity to close the gap between the growing need and availability of services that support older adults, residents with disabilities, and their families.

The bill sets out to accomplish the following:

- Establish a new minimum wage that is not less than 120% of the District Living Wage for all direct care workers.
- Require DC Health to establish a new universal credential for direct care workers that combines home health aide and certified nursing assistant competencies.
- Allow qualified entities to evaluate direct care worker competency.
- Allow Maryland and Virginia home health aides and CNAs to work in DC
- Requires the Mayor to review and eliminate barriers to the development and support of on-the-job training programs and registered apprenticeship programs.

LeadingAge DC thanks Councilmember Henderson and Council co-sponsors for introducing and supporting this Act that will raise the wages of direct care workers and help rebuild this vital sector of our healthcare workforce.

## How Councilmembers Can Help

The time is now to ensure access to consistently high-quality care for residents across the District. We ask that Council do the following:

- Support the proposed funding increase for Senior Villages (\$350K)
- Restore \$920K in the DAFL budget for needed in-home services
- Support the DCWAA, especially establishing reimbursement rates to each eligible provider of direct care services inclusive of payment of a progressive wage scale to direct care workers
- Promote a centralized strategic policy leadership approach and cross-government coordination to address the needs of older adults and families—including a healthy workforce to provide care.