



June 27, 2025

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Subject: Preserve Funding for Aging Services in the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor FY26 Budget

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

On behalf of the DC Coalition on Long Term Care, we write to express our strong support for the FY26 budget recommendations made by the Council's Committee on Executive Administration and Labor.

The Coalition is a 30 year old alliance of consumers, advocates, and healthcare providers committed to ensuring that low income residents with chronic conditions and disabilities can age safely and with dignity in their communities, supported by high quality long term care services

While the Mayor's proposed FY26 budget included reductions that would significantly harm critical services for older adults and individuals living with dementia, we commend the Committee's thoughtful action to restore and enhance funding in key areas. In particular, we applaud the inclusion of funds for the Ward 3 Lead Agency Dementia Navigator Program and the restoration of resources for the DC Senior Villages. We respectfully urge you to preserve these essential adjustments as the Council finalizes the FY26 budget.

Iona's Citywide Dementia Navigator Program: A Lifeline for Families

The Dementia Navigator Program at Iona Senior Services is a vital support for District residents facing the challenges of a dementia diagnosis. Staffed by experienced, licensed clinical social workers, the program provides individualized guidance, care coordination, and connections to dementia-specific resources—offering crucial support to individuals and families throughout the course of the disease.

Since its inception in 2017, and through data collected in spring 2024, the program has served 329 individuals with dementia and their families. Importantly, 59% of those served reside in historically underserved areas—Wards 5, 7, and 8—highlighting its impact on our most vulnerable communities.

We were deeply concerned to see the Mayor's FY26 budget eliminate funding for this program. However, we are grateful that the Committee responded by allocating \$250,000 in ongoing funding for the Ward 3 Lead Agency Dementia Navigator Program under the Department of Aging and Community Living. We urge you to maintain this critical investment, ensuring continued access to expert dementia navigation services for families across the District. We are also requesting that in future budgets for this program that resources be provided for transportation. Residents traveling from Eastern portions of the city must take long car drives and bewildering public transit for services offered mid-day and mid-week.

DC Villages: Essential Community Infrastructure

The DC Villages model is a cornerstone of our community-based support network for older adults. Unfortunately, the Mayor's FY26 proposal includes both the loss of a one-time \$350,000 enhancement and a \$56,000 reduction from the FY24 baseline (FY24 Actual: \$748,000; FY26 Proposed: \$692,000). These cuts threaten not only the stability of current Village operations but also efforts to expand access to new neighborhoods and underserved populations.

Without adequate support, Villages may be forced to reduce services, limit subsidized memberships for low-income seniors, or in some cases, shut down—leaving many without the vital connections and supports they rely on to age in place safely.

The Village model delivers measurable, transformative value:

- **Expanded and Evolving Services:** Villages now offer caregiver respite, solo aging support, vaccine clinics, and advocacy on medical and financial issues.
- **First Line of Support:** They help residents avoid hospital readmissions, navigate medical systems, access medications, and address early signs of distress or isolation.
- **Bridging Systemic Gaps:** Villages fill the space between government programs and personal resources, especially for seniors aging without family.
- **Scalable Solutions:** As DC's older adult population grows, Villages are innovating to serve diverse communities across all eight wards.
- **Life-Changing Impact:** From housing stability to reliable transportation and health care access, Villages create tangible, lasting outcomes.

The Committee's FY26 recommendations include a recurring \$350,000 transfer—indexed to inflation—for Senior Villages, and a one-time \$100,000 investment to incubate two new Villages in Ward 7. We fully support these proposals and urge their inclusion in the final FY26 budget.

Conclusion

Chairman Mendelson, the continued funding of the Iona Dementia Navigator Program and the sustainability of the DC Villages initiative are vital to the health, dignity, and independence of our aging population. These are not optional enhancements—they are core components of a just and effective long-term care system, especially for residents in underserved neighborhoods.

We respectfully ask the Council to adopt the Committee's recommendations and ensure full funding for these programs in the FY26 budget. Your leadership on this issue will directly impact the lives of thousands of older adults and their families across the District.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome the opportunity to provide further information or testimony, and we look forward to your favorable response.

Sincerely,

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<https://www.dclongtermcare.org/>