

June 30, 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 LeadingAge DC, a network of mission-driven aging services providers in the District of Columbia, and as an active participant of the DC Long-Term Care Coalition, we write to express our support for the recommendations made by the Council's Committee on Executive Administration and Labor ("the Committee") on the Mayor's FY26 budget proposal. While the original proposal as submitted to Council included funding cuts that would severely impact vital programs for older adults and individuals living with dementia in our city, we commend the Council's thoughtful addition of funding for the Ward 3 Lead Agency Dementia Navigator Program as well as restoration of funding for the Senior Villages, and respectfully urge you to preserve these critical adjustments.

We wish to highlight two programs that are essential to the well-being of our aging residents:

Iona's Citywide Dementia Navigator Program: A Critical Lifeline

Iona's citywide Dementia Navigator program is an invaluable resource for District residents. Led by compassionate and highly skilled licensed clinical social workers, this program provides crucial assistance to individuals and families navigating the complexities of a dementia diagnosis. Its comprehensive approach offers ongoing care management and expertly links participants to essential aging and dementia-specific resources.

Since its launch in 2017 through data collection in spring of 2024, the program has made a tangible difference in the lives of 329 people with dementia and their family members. Notably, the program positively impacts the District's most vulnerable communities: fifty-nine percent of those served reside in the historically underserved Wards 5, 7, and 8.

It is with deep concern that we learned the Mayor's FY26 budget proposes the elimination of funding for this important program. We are, however, immensely grateful for the Committee's wisdom in adding \$250,000 in ongoing funding for the Ward 3 Lead Agency Dementia Navigator Program within the FY26 budget for the Department on Aging and

Community Living. We strongly urge you, Mr. Chairman, to uphold this vital adjustment as you finalize the Council's budget modifications for FY26, ensuring that critical dementia navigation services continue to be available to District residents.

DC Villages: An Essential First Line of Defense

As originally proposed, the FY26 budget for the DC Villages initiative presented a significant challenge to a model that has proven indispensable to our older adult population. The Mayor's proposal reflected not only the loss of a one-time \$350,000 funding allocation but also an additional \$56,000 reduction from the FY24 baseline (FY24 Actual: \$748,000; FY26 Proposed: \$692,000).

This proposed funding level is simply not sufficient to sustain existing Village operations, let alone support the planned start-up of new Villages necessary to support more aging residents in more neighborhoods across the District. Without adequate funding, Villages may be forced to reduce the range of services offered, decrease the number of low-income seniors who receive subsidized memberships, or, in the worst-case scenario, close altogether, leaving countless vulnerable seniors without critical support.

The value proposition of the Village model for the District of Columbia is undeniable:

- **Expanded Services and Reach:** The Village model has organically grown to include a broader array of supportive services, such as caregiver respite, dedicated support for solo agers, vaccination clinics, and crucial medical and financial advocacy, serving an increasing number of older adults in DC. Concurrently, the proportion of low-income residents served across all Wards has also seen a significant increase.
- **Proactive Community Support:** Villages serve as the critical "first line of defense" against contextual threats to the wellbeing of older adult residents. By fostering community connection, residents have successfully avoided inpatient readmissions, addressed harassment resulting from medical billing errors, facilitated transportation to critical medical appointments, ensured access to life-sustaining medications, and received early intervention for signs of distress, isolation, or unmet needs.
- **Bridging Gaps:** Villages effectively bridge the gaps between public safety net supports and individual resources, proving particularly vital in cases where residents are aging in place without family support.
- **Sustainable Solutions for a Growing Population:** As the proportion of older adult residents in the District continues to grow, DC Villages are actively exploring

strategies to sustainably and equitably meet the emerging needs across diverse geographic and socio-economic populations of residents.

- **Transformative Impact:** The supports provided by Villages consistently extend beyond their original scope of work, generating life-changing impacts on critical areas such as housing stability, appropriate healthcare utilization, reliable transportation access, and much more.

In the Executive Administration and Labor report, the Committee recommends that the Committee on Human Services transfer \$350,000 on a recurring annual basis, including inflation adjustments in the out years, for Senior Villages. Further, the Committee proposes the issue of a one-time enhancement in the amount of \$100,000 for two Senior Villages Incubators located in Ward 7. We unequivocally support these critical funding recommendations and implore you to ensure that they are included in the final FY26 Budget.

In conclusion, Chairman Mendelson, the continued vitality of the Iona Dementia Navigator program and the robust operation of the DC Villages are paramount to ensuring that all older adults in the District of Columbia can age with dignity, safety, and community support. These programs are not merely services; they are foundational pillars of our long-term care infrastructure, particularly for our most underserved communities.

We strongly urge the Council to preserve full funding for these essential programs in the final FY26 budget, as recommended by the Committee. Your leadership in this matter will directly impact the quality of life for thousands of older adults and their families across the District.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical request. We look forward to your favorable response and stand ready to provide any additional information you may require.

Sincerely,

Makeda Vanderpuije

Executive Director, LeadingAge DC