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Testimony of Neil Richardson, Deputy Director DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

Council of the District of Columbia Committee on Health & Committee on Hospital & Health Equity FY 2023 Performance Oversight Hearing of DC Health Care Finance

February 8, 2024

INTRODUCTION

DC Appleseed is a non-profit research and advocacy organization dedicated to making the District a better place to live and work. For over 25 years, DC Appleseed has worked to improve the District, paying particular attention to the needs of our most vulnerable residents including children, older adults, and people who are medically underserved.

BACKGROUND

My name is Neil Richardson, and I am the deputy director at DC Appleseed. Today, I am testifying in my capacity as the acting coordinator of the DC Coalition on Long-Term Care. The Coalition works to expand and improve the quality of long-term care programs and ensure that District residents living on low incomes and with disabilities can age in the community safely and with dignity. The Coalition comprises over 80 organizations and stakeholders, bringing together consumers, advocates, and healthcare providers to work with the District government on long-term care issues. DC Appleseed supports the efforts of the Coalition to ensure all DC residents can access affordable and appropriate care, and their efforts to improve training, work conditions, and compensation for DC's long-term care workforce.

Currently, the District struggles with an inadequate number of long-term care beds in facilities, as well as an inadequate number of providers offering care services in homes. The shortage of long-term care services disparately impacts individuals who cannot afford to pay for care privately. Consistent and quality care should be provided to ALL no matter where they live, what they look like, or their economic status.

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Affiliations listed only for identification purposes

The Coalition hopes that, Deputy Mayor Wayne Turnage working specifically with Dr. Ayanna Bennett, Director of the Department of Health, will understand the issues involving long term care are in fact - a crisis. More than 4,500 workers have left the job since last year representing nearly a third of the workforce. Due to the capacity of training providers to prepare people for these jobs it will take years to catch up. To fill the gap, we recommend that the District reintroduce emergency protocols that were employed during the COVID Public Health Emergency which allows long term care workers from Maryland to serve DC residents. To address the workforce crisis, we request that the Deputy Mayor pull together the variety of agencies involved in training, credentialing and policy making to better coordinate the sector and streamline obstacles to expeditiously reinforce the workforce.

RECOMMENDATION

Deputy Mayor Wayne Turnage, in collaboration with the Department of Health should form a working group bringing together and increasing collaboration between the multitude of District agencies that impact long-term care services.

DC Health is one of many agencies involved in the provision of direct care services. Collectively, members of the Long-Term Care Coalition are not aware of any regular meetings between all the DC agencies involved in long-term care services. Policy, regulatory issues, education, credentialing, Medicaid reimbursements, and behavioral health all impact this sector, its consumers, and its workforce. Deputy Mayor has the authority to bring these agencies together.

For example, DC Health who has oversight of the Board of Nursing, which administers exams for home health aides, and DC Health staff are responsible for endorsing, credentialing and providing licensure to long-term care providers. The Department of Aging and Community Living (“DACL”) supports consumers with transportation needs and also issues parking passes for aides visiting consumers’ homes. Elderly and Persons with a Disability waivers, which reimburse consumers for care services at home instead of through an assisted living facility, are administered jointly by DACL and the DC Department of Health Care Finance (“DCHCF”). DCHCF also reimburses the agencies who employ the aides and sets the wage rate for these aides. The Workforce



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Investment Council (“WIC”) coordinates with employers to identify job opportunities and provide necessary training in the health care professions. The Department of Employee Services oversees the WIC and guides funding to training providers. Consumers with dementia, Alzheimer’s, and/or behavioral health conditions often require services from the Department of Behavioral Health. Applications for Medicare are completed through District Direct, which is an application managed by the Economic Security Administration in DC’s Department of Human Services. This web of interacting services means that the system cannot function without collaboration. When agencies work in silos, that compounds the challenges of delivering services to residents.

We highly recommend that the Deputy Mayor Wayne Turnage work in collaboration with Dr. Bennett and the Department of Health to bring the disparate government actors together, begin regular meetings to address the current barriers to reinforce the long term care workforce and ensure that quality, affordable care for DC residents is never in doubt. The DC Coalition on Long-Term Care stands ready to support such an initiative.