

**District of Columbia Commission on Aging  
Meeting Minutes for  
Wednesday, February 28, 2018**

**Attendance**

**Commissioners present:** Carolyn Nicholas; George Arnstein; Guleford Bobo; Barbara Hair; Charles Hicks; Barbara Lee; Carolyn Matthews; Marguerite Pridgen; Mary Taylor; Constance Woody

**Ex-Officio Members:** David Quick (DCPL); Veronica Longstreth (DOH); Cesar Barreto (DDOT)

**Members of the Public:** K Brisbane (SSOUP); Veronica Ingram (Ward 4 Mini-Commission); Barbara Flood (Community member)

**D.C. Office on Aging (DCOA) Staff Present:** Christian Barrera, Special Assistant; Karen Dorbin, Director of Communications, Michael Kirkwood, General Counsel; Tanya Reid, Administrative Support Manager

**I. Call to Order**

The Chairwoman called the meeting to order at approximately 10:05 a.m.

**II. Review and Approval of Minutes**

The meeting minutes from the Commission's January 2017 meeting were reviewed and approved as they were.

**III. Presentations**

**Seniors Speaking Out and Up (SSOUP):**

The Chairwoman introduced Ms. K Brisbane from Seniors Speaking Out and Up (SSOUP) for a presentation to the Commission.

Ms. Brisbane expressed how thankful she is for the Commission's existence, and that SSOUP is an extension of the efforts by the Commission. Membership is growing across the city. SSOUP has learned a lot from the over 990 members at Model Cities about their needs. She expects to discuss what is important during the April 25<sup>th</sup> Budget Hearing. Ms. Brisbane expressed that when the Senior Wellness Center (Model Cities) was built, the city did not take into consideration the demographics of the District. She expressed that the senior population continues to grow, but the center was built for less participants and cannot accommodate everybody. Model Cities is currently putting people on hold who want to participate in classes because there is not enough room. There is only one exercise room.

Ms. Brisbane expressed that the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services had stated that the city will not be building any more brick and mortar facilities, and looking at virtual centers. Ms. Brisbane stated virtual wellness will not work for Model Cities – Seniors want to build relationships at the physical centers. SSOUP has kept asking the city for years for an expansion of the Model Cities Senior Wellness Center.

Ms. Brisbane hopes that some of the \$500 million dollars in excess for the city will be used towards an expansion of the Model Cities Center. This is not on DCOA, but the Mayor who commits the funds.

Ms. Brisbane explained that transportation at the Senior Wellness Center is also an issue. She stated every center needs one, and in some cases centers have fought to keep a bus such as at the Bernice Fonteneau Senior Wellness Center.

There are 108,000 seniors in the city. Ms. Brisbane asked: “How does the DCOA and the Mayor know what seniors want and need?” She recommended the city funds a citywide assessment with survey tools to learn more about this. SSOUP has helped change what people talk about at Model Cities – now, they’re talking more about what seniors across the city want and need.

Ms. Brisbane wants to ensure that the Senior Olympics are done, and that fees do not go up because it deters seniors from participating. Seniors have to pay for the trip to nationals if you win. She would like in 2023 to see the Mayor to put a bid for the Senior Olympics to be in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Brisbane expressed there is limited communication between DCOA and seniors.

Commissioner Nicholas asked if Ms. Brisbane has any recommendations for getting information to seniors. Ms. Brisbane offered the following: 1) Commissioners should make representations around the city; 2) DCOA should do more and the Mayor should talk about other city services when she talks about the Safe at Home Program; and 3) provide more opportunities to interact and talk to seniors across the city.

Commissioner Bobo expressed his agreement in terms of expanding the Senior Wellness Centers. However, he said there should be room for both – an expansion of the centers as well as virtual centers. He stated that in Ward 7 the Center is in a place hard for seniors to get to the center, and that residents must take two buses to get to it. Commissioner Bobo explained that the reason it is so hard to get to the Ward 7 Senior Wellness Center is that it takes a long time, when not driving.

Ms. Brisbane was asked how the DC Ambassadors Program is going from her perspective. She expressed the training is outstanding. However, this is more information-oriented, and not aligned with opportunities to get the information to other people unless the Ambassadors goes out in the community. Ms. Brisbane expressed that part of the problem with information is understanding, for example, it can be hard to understand what a senior virtual wellness is about. She would like to see the Mayor encourage people to collaborate and more interagency work.

Commissioner Nicholas asked about the history of SSOU and how it got started. Ms. Brisbane expressed this came as an idea after a SAC meeting, where Ms. Brisbane along with a few other

seniors realized there was a need for an organization to allow for seniors to speak up. SSOU has grown to 35 members now.

SSOU is happy to assist the Commission as needed, and work out a strategy.

#### **IV. DCOA Update:**

Director Newland Laura opened her remarks by thanking Ms. Brisbane. She encourages seniors to continue speaking for themselves not just through providers. This pushes DCOA to be better and do more. Director expressed her appreciation for the work that SSOU does daily for seniors across the city. DCOA is also here to advocate.

Director Newland believes that grassroots advocacy organizations should remain independent. Therefore, DCOA only attends SAC meetings upon invitation only, as there are instances when they may not want the agency present during their discussions. This allows providers and seniors to talk freely about their concerns without any worry about funding relationships or the such. Director Newland encourages the commission to continue playing a crucial role in the community.

Director Newland stated she will follow up regarding the SWC bus assignment issues. She stated that every center should have one.

Commissioner Bobo asked Director Newland about the Congress Heights bus regarding group trips and delays in scheduling and arrival/departure times. Director Newland committed to following up.

Director Newland explained the term “virtual” wellness center came from the community; however, DCOA is switching to talk about “satellite” wellness centers to clarify the concepts. Director Newland clarified that there may not be an immediate need to build new facilities but the city should have satellite locations to use private or public space that is available. Programming could then be brought to these locations closer to seniors in the community. The challenge will be to create quality programming at these locations, especially in Wards 2 and 3. DCOA has begun expanding access to programming throughout the city through the Fit and Well Program.

Director Newland provided an overview of her performance oversight hearing, and thanked everyone who testified. The commissioners outlasted the service providers, which was incredible.

Commissioner Matthews commented that Bernice Fonteneau has begun to purge the roster. She also mentioned that some fitness attendees are not equipped to handle the classes, and that the Director of the SWC’s position is that a medical certificate is enough to allow them to participate. She also stated that Safe at Home customers are calling TERRIFIC Directly and that there’s some confusion in the community about who to call. Director Newland addressed these comments as follow:

- DCOA requests grantees to annually update client information. “Purge” is not DCOA’s terminology. It’s done to comply with federal requirements to update client info. The result will be that if you cannot update this information, it becomes inactive. So, DCOA is making sure everyone is doing it in a uniform manner.
- The medical clearance forms are meant to allow senior to have choice on the classes they join. DCOA received complaints about seniors feeling the agency was treating them like children. The certificate used to be more specific. But people over 60 still need to make their own decisions, even bad decisions, and they have that right. However, this should be balanced with health and safety. If DCOA moves in any direction, DCOA will move towards independent decision-making.
- Safe at Home continues to get an average of 150 people signing up for services. DCOA has had only one grantee for most of the existence of the program. A new grantee, TERRIFIC, has been added to help manage data and demand of the program so that the city can keep up with the demand. The Director does not want residents to call multiple places – therefore DCOA has a centralized phone line at the agency. Clients should not worry about calling multiple offices.

Director Newland updated the Commissioners on recent complaints about DCOA’s Information and Referral/Assistance line. There had been a lot of abandoned calls. The message was also not adequate, so DCOA is working on changing the message. DCOA ensured dramatic changes to the line, and what used to be a poor answer rate is now a rate of 90 – 95% from 10%. The Director encouraged the Commissioners to let her know of any complaints they hear in the community about the line.

Commissioner Bobo stated his passion is social services for his community. Caregivers have been running into issues at the lead agencies. He heard of a case where after 3 weeks a social worker had not been assigned. The caregiver was very distraught. Director Newland reemphasized that she would like to hear from Commissioners when they see cases like this in the community as soon as possible. While, they are not DCOA staff, she is committed to addressing issues such as these. Director Newland mentioned that case management has been a challenge, and it is something she is working with the lead agencies.

Commissioner Bobo expressed he emailed Karen Dorbin, DCOA Communications Director, about resources for the caregiver; Karen shared the resources with him. The Director expressed that no matter where you go, you should be able to access services, and that Commissioners can reach out to DCOA whenever they see issues happening because the system is not perfect yet, and the feedback will help.

The Commissioner Pridgen asked about the replacement of DC General and if some of the space at the new Short-Term Family Shelters (STFH) can and/or will accommodate senior programming, daytime activities or meeting space, and shelter for seniors.

Director Laura will reach out to DHS about it. She does not know about how these new shelters will be operated. She is in conversation with DHS currently about homeless seniors as well as DPR for use of community centers, especially in Ward 3. Director Newland expressed DCOA can do a better job in general about dedicated seniors spaces. STFH sites may not be a good fit for seniors as these are more for families experiencing homelessness. Director Newland will follow up on this item.

Commissioner Hicks mentioned a conversation with Councilmember Bonds about doing some activities for black history month. Director Newland expressed she is in discussions with DPR Director, including the senior games in 2018. It is early on to pitch to host but the Mayor is interested in hosting senior games 2023.

Commissioner Nicholas asked why do people come to Vida from everywhere in DC? Director Newland expressed it is one of our cultural sites. It is specific to Spanish-speaking seniors, like the Asian senior center.

Commissioner Nicholas reiterated using churches to spread information. Director Newland informed her that DCOA does go to churches and synagogues and work to have relationships with faith-based communities to spread information

Commissioner Nicholas asked about existing senior advocacy groups. Director Newland listed all relevant advocacy groups including IONA, Villages, SAC, etc.

Commissioner Bobo mentioned that nothing about the senior games is being advertised. There should be a longer time to prepare on any program. The Director agreed, and stated this is the first year DCOA is part of the conversation. DCOA will be talking on Friday about the advance advertisement and where it should go. The Director mentioned logistics need to be worked out before advertising an event.

Commissioner Matthews expressed the need for a database on underserved seniors. The Commissioner stated she understands privacy issues around a database. There are issues for seniors when it comes to property taxes. Director Newland stated the Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR) shares the list with DCOA.

Commissioner Matthews followed up with remaining concerns that it is getting to the point where seniors are underserved and may not have been reached out to. Director Newland emphasized that ANCs, neighborhoods, associations, commissioners – getting them to understand the vulnerable population in their communities is key.

Commissioner Nicholas added to the discussion by noting that data sharing aligns and fits with Goal 1 on doing a citywide assessment. She noted Councilmember Todd has introduced legislation.

Commissioner Matthews added that the property tax legislation is back on the table, but would like to know about people 70 years of age or older. It should be tiered. Property taxes should stay the same. 10% increase is too much and is unfair.

Commissioner Hair mentioned that she has been in contact with an ANC Commissioner for info on seniors who live in Ward 8 senior buildings. She also reached out to the Board of Elections, they will share a list of people 60+, but it will take some time. She also reached out to DHCD and left a voicemail for Frank Demeris. She wants names of seniors in public housing, and will let the Commission know if she got the list.

Ms. Brisbane called DCOA to ask about today's meeting and she got asked for her name, address, ward, etc. – she was only asking a simple question. She noted many people would have hung up. People should know why these questions are being asked. Director Newland noted that

this is not a requirement but a reporting component for DCOA. She will follow up with staff to ensure it is not a requirement.

Ms. Brisbane also recommended providing transportation to senior games. Director Newland recommended having the wellness centers to schedule a group trip. Ms. Brisbane expressed that sites have a limited # of group trips allotted and trips like the senior games will interrupt normal trips. Director Newland will look into it.

The Commission would like for Director Newland to share the list from OTR. The Director stated this may or may not be possible as she does not feel comfortable sharing the list. However, the list is also shared with advocates such as LCE. Commissioners can also request it from OTR directly.

Commissioner Bobo briefly discussed the Home-Delivered Meals. He expressed 300 meals now being served in his ward. He wanted to express how impressed he is with this number.

Commissioner Hicks asked for Director Newland to share where seniors go to get their income taxes done. He is getting questions on where to go and what time. Director Newland stated that AARP has a tax aid program, and there are volunteers who go to people's homes. This is for people who are 50+. Tanya Reid will follow up with phone number and more information.

## **V. Special Announcement**

Director Newland Announced that DCOA's General Counsel, Michael Kirkwood is leaving DCOA. The Director expressed that working with him has been a distinctive pleasure. Staff love him. He has been the liaison to Commission and Elder Abuse Committee as well. He is respectful, and the agency learned so much from him and he will be missed.

Commissioner Hicks: Recommended that a letter of salutation to Michael K. Commissioners be written. All Commissioners present agreed. Chairwoman Nicholas stated she would be responsible for the letter.

Chairwoman Nicholas expressed she will miss Michael. He has been very supportive, and wishes all happiness to him.

Michael Kirkwood expressed his gratitude to the Commission.

## **VI. New Business**

### **Commission on Aging FY18 Goals**

Chairperson Nicholas provided a handout with the FY18 proposed Commission goals. The Chairperson committed to sending them around again. The Chairwoman asked how the

Commission should implement the goals and ideas on how to make it happen. The Chairwoman opened the floor for all comments:

- Commissioner Hicks: Commission on Women had a two-day city-wide hearing, people came and talked about their issues and suggestions; commissioners listened. The question was: how we can better assist women? It was two days, and it was a way to hear directly from the people and well publicized. Looking for churches and community groups to emphasize that the commission wants to hear from them. Think about in the spring or prior to the Symposium figuring out how the Commission can put out issues and invite people to come and express what they think are problems and possible solutions. This could be a way to gather input.
- Commissioner Bobo: Certain number of seniors may not want to be in the system or part of it. Of 200 in a senior building only 40 participate in meals program. They choose not to participate. Another example is a village program only 30 or 40 participate as well. Seniors may think you're invading their privacy.
- Commissioner Matthews: For the goals, there should be interagency focus and what agencies can offer. The Commission could do a forum or town hall. The focus could be on what can agencies provide for the seniors who want services, and want to participate. The Commissioner raised that there are quite many goals to find solutions for. The Commission could use ANCs, SWCs, churches, etc. to use as hubs to get info. There should be info gathering. The question is: what can the agencies do? These will help ensure that the Commission can make informed decisions, and what's available to discuss with seniors. This will help seniors know what's available with no privacy issues and ensure people who want services do get them and those who do not want services do not feel their privacy was evaded.
- Commissioner Nicholas stated that the role of the Commission is to advise DCOA and the Mayor. The Commissioner expressed not following Commissioner's Matthews comment. She explained that the citywide assessment would come under a contract not up to the Commission. She will testify on this bill.
- Commissioner Hicks: The Commission should ask seniors and find a way to ask and listen to all seniors what they would like the Commission to consider. What should the commission be doing for them? More money in the budget for seniors for transportation for example could be a priority a senior may want the Commission to explore. He would like to figure out a way for seniors to express their issues at places like churches, ANCs, etc. He volunteered to assist.
- Commissioner Nicholas raised that there is no money so how will this happen? Commissioner Hicks expressed this can be held at public locations or spaces.
- Commissioner Lee: Recommends taking information back to civic associations, and neighbors.
- Commissioner Matthews is working with a partner to help expand transportation options for seniors.

Chairwoman Nicholas referred to former Mayor Barry's charge to go to Council to testify. The Chairwoman announced the statute reveal of Marion Barry on Saturday outside the John A. Wilson Building. The Commissioners will reach out to Darlene for tickets.

The Chairwoman reminded the Commissioners that the DCOA Budget Hearing will be on April 25<sup>th</sup> at the John A. Wilson Building. Commissioner Hicks let other Commissioners know they can still submit testimony if they cannot attend the hearing in person.

Chairperson Nicholas covered bills introduced by Council. The Chairperson has met with key councilmembers, the Office of the Attorney General, MPD, and Councilmember Robert White to ensure appropriate resources, authority and enforcement of laws for people who exploit seniors in Washington, D.C. Chairperson Nicholas stated that Councilmember White has requested for additional FTEs to the Mayor on this issue.

The Commission would like to prepare a letter campaign to support the Commission's stand on legislative issues.

#### **VII. Committee Reports**

No Committee Reports.

#### **VIII. Ward Reports**

No Ward Reports.

#### **IX. Announcements**

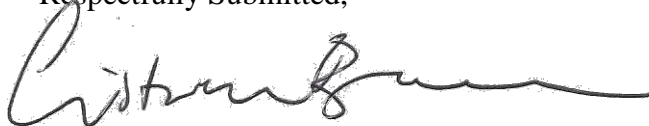
Chairwoman Nicholas announced that Commissioner Buddy Moore is stepping down from the Commission. Nominations for vice-chair will be accepted during the next Commission meeting.

#### **X. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:20 PM.

These minutes were recorded by Christian Barrera, Special Assistant. Office on Aging, and were formally approved by the Commission on Aging on March 28, 2018.

Respectfully Submitted,



/s/ Christian Barrera

Christian Barrera

Special Assistant

District of Columbia Office on Aging