

Subject: The Need for the DC Council to Create & Permanently Fund the Position of Dementia Services Coordinator and Enhance Training for Those Providing Care to, or Interacting with, People Living with Dementia

For: DC Council Committee on Health Budget Oversight on the DC Department of Health

From: Testimony by Dean Brenner, 5044 Macomb Street, NW, Washington DC 20016

Date: April 9, 2019

Chairman Gray and Members of the Committee, my name is Dean Brenner, and I live in Ward 3. I'm testifying once again to ask for your support to create and permanently fund the position of Dementia Services Coordinator in DC, as well as providing enhanced training to those people who care for, or whose jobs require them to interact with, people in DC living with dementia.

As I told you in February, no person in the Health Department, or in any other DC government office or department, is responsible for providing information and support to the approximately 8,900 DC residents age 65 and older living with Alzheimer's disease and their families, and many others who are younger than 65. Alzheimer's is the most expensive disease in America. DC spends over \$120 million just in the Medicaid costs for people age 65 or older with Alzheimer's. We need a permanent Dementia Services Coordinator, just like many states such as Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina have. I know the Alzheimer's

Association has shared some draft language with the Committee, which we hope you will introduce as legislation this Council session.

I say a permanent Dementia Services Coordinator, which we estimate would cost approximately \$100,000 per year, because the Mayor's budget request calls for a one-time expenditure of \$100,000 for a staff person to conduct a city-wide assessment of dementia services. We very much appreciate for the first time seeing something in the request to address dementia, but with respect, we need much more than just a one-time assessment that may sit on a shelf or a temporary employee who will come and go. We need a permanent employee whose job it will be to help the thousands of people living with Alzheimer's and their families find information and support, and who would also ensure that clinicians in DC have comprehensive, up-to-date information about available supports from the federal and DC government and the community.

Rather than merely funding an assessment, let's start addressing the massive problems: Alzheimer's is a public health crisis, but the District government does not have any dedicated full-time staff working on Alzheimer's. The demographics of people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are especially troubling. Older African Americans are about twice as likely, and older Hispanics are about one and a half times as likely, to have Alzheimer's or other dementias as older whites. Almost two-thirds of the people with Alzheimer's are women.

And, employees in assisted living facilities and the DC government itself do not receive adequate training—or in many cases, any training—in how to interact with people with dementia. A one-time assessment won't address any of these fundamental problems.

In 2013, DC released the DC State Plan for Alzheimer's for 2014-2019. The plan listed many goals, and for each one, many organizations responsible for achieving the goal, including the Health Department and other DC agencies. Six years after the plan's release, most of the goals have not been achieved, and we don't have a plan for next year and beyond. Simply funding a one-time assessment is insufficient. The District has a \$14 billion budget. That's billion. We can surely find \$100,000 to fund a permanent Dementia Services Coordinator. Thousands of people living in DC with dementia and their families desperately need this.

Unfortunately, I am speaking again from personal experience. My mother died in September 2018 after a four-year fight with Alzheimer's. My mother was a remarkable person. She was the first woman in the history of her town in New Jersey elected to the town's council, and she served for 21 years on the board of education.

When my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, she initially hid it from me. I later found out that she had suffered a series of calamities—she drove with an expired driver's license, she did not pay her utility bills, and she missed doctor's

appointments. She needed help, but she was afraid and unable to seek it. This is a very common situation. I had to get her help, but I didn't know where to begin.

I looked on many web sites, and I called every department and service provider I could find. I got nowhere. Finally, thank goodness, I called the Alzheimer's Association, and we got her help outside of the government. I am very lucky, but others are not so lucky. Many other people with Alzheimer's and their families never find the help they need.

I urge you to pass legislation creating and funding a permanent Dementia Services Coordinator and to require training for anyone whose job calls for interaction with people with dementia.

Thank you.