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CHEVY CHASE, BARNABY WOODS, HAWTHORNE

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ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization
Performance Oversight Hearing on the
Department of Aging and Community Living
February 25, 2020

Chairperson Bonds and members of the Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization, I am Randy Speck, Chair of ANC 3/4G (Chevy Chase), and I am testifying on behalf of our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its February 24, 2020 meeting by a vote of 4 to 0 (a quorum being 4).

Our ANC — which uniquely straddles two wards, the part of Ward 4 west of Rock Creek Park and the northeastern part of Ward 3 — represents a large number of seniors, both those aging in place and those living in retirement communities. Despite a pressing need for senior services, the District does not have a brick-and-mortar senior wellness center that can support our community. To fill this gap, a number of seniors have organized themselves around activities at the Chevy Chase Community Center or the Chevy Chase Public Library to advocate for more programs and more opportunities to socialize

and interact with others. Those efforts have been successful in expanding offerings and engaging seniors. Advocating for programs and services that promote and/or support the health and well-being of seniors is a top priority for ANC 3/4G. It is always a struggle, however, to reach out to those who are not yet involved and to communicate about additional opportunities and available services.

Beginning in the fall of 2018, Iona Senior Services requested our input on its effort — funded by the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL) — to create a “virtual senior wellness center” for Wards 2 and 3. I participated in several community meetings that sought to identify the most pressing needs and ways to inform and involve seniors through technology. We discussed senior programming that was available at community centers, libraries, churches, and synagogues and how information on those activities could be spread more broadly to seniors. We gave feedback on ideas as they evolved, including a prototype of the website.

The result was Around Town DC, a successful and useful guide to activities that are nearby and accessible for seniors in our community. Based on feedback I’ve received from our seniors, yoga, Zumba, and Move to Music classes have been particularly popular and have been taught by experienced, qualified instructors. Trips like those to the Botanical Gardens and concerts were well organized and well attended. The weekly emails provide a well-organized rundown of upcoming programs and activities specifically geared to seniors in our area. While a brick-and-mortar senior wellness center is preferable because it provides a place for seniors to socialize and interact even without

attending any specific programs, Around Town DC provides an important way for seniors to connect with others who have similar interests and to maintain an active, engaged lifestyle. One senior said that when her husband died, she began attending seniors' classes and "a whole new chapter in my life opened up." The work Iona is doing can change lives for the better. Around Town DC will be even more important for our senior community when the Chevy Chase Community Center modernization begins in early 2021 and this hub for senior activities will be closed for 12 to 18 months.

My experience with Around Town DC has been uniformly positive. The staff from Iona are skilled, dedicated, and open to input from the community. They did an excellent job in planning the program so that it was implemented efficiently and effectively. I am confident that if they are funded to expand to other Wards, they will be equally successful.

Thank you.