

# Emmaus Services for the Aging

Improving the Lives of Seniors Since 1978



Testimony of Rev. Joseph K. Williams, Sr., M.Div.  
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Administration on Aging Listening Session  
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“The Need for Inclusive Community Among Older Adults”

Good morning. I am Joseph K. Williams, Sr., Executive Director for Emmaus Services for the Aging, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear today to testify at the Administration on Aging Listening Session.

For more than 30 years, Emmaus Services for the Aging has provided well-defined, structured services to seniors in the District of Columbia (from age 60 to 104) that support their transition from isolation to a place of community and connection. Many of the seniors that we serve live at or well below the poverty level, have multiple health issues and lack the resources vital to basic living as a resident in the District of Columbia. EMMAUS believes that the Frisky, Fragile and Frail senior deserves services without cracks and barriers; while working to insure that the low-income senior does not become a member of the “underclass” and that the vulnerable elderly does not become low-income.

The District of Columbia, like many jurisdictions throughout the country, has been hit by the strained economy and had to make hard choices regarding social services. The financial support for seniors services and the resources to execute the Older Americans Act has become a tremendous challenge – accompanied by the demographic changes among the Older Adult population. I submit that the Administration on Aging could play a significant role by supporting partnerships that build community rather than divide communities – more specifically Inclusive Communities Among Older Adults.

There are approximately **8,346** seniors residing in Ward 2 of the District of Columbia. This represents 9% of the senior population in Washington, DC. Emmaus Services for the Aging has leveraged its role as Ward 2 Lead Agency for the DC Office on Aging, by collaborating with two other non-profits to engage stakeholders in building an Inclusive Caring Community (ICC) in the Ward. The ICC innovatively promotes coordination between formal service delivery and circles of informal giving and receiving. This has begun to generate health and wellness, caregiver and client resiliency, and expanded services to facilitate aging-in-place. Integrating our strong volunteer component with specialized, coordinated and comprehensive care systems is creating inclusive caring communities of seniors, volunteers, families, and caregivers spanning age, income and ethnic lines across 11 diverse neighborhoods.

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Our efforts engage community stakeholders, develops infrastructure enabling seniors, volunteers, families, caregivers and implements innovative service models for expanded service delivery by rewarding community contributions and valuing time and community. Our hope is that this effort will expand multi-dimensional, intergenerational and innovative services for seniors, especially low-income/vulnerable seniors; transform receivers into contributors, and contributors into receivers; improve ratios of informal to formal services; increase vulnerable seniors' ability to remain active in their communities; improve quality of life for vulnerable seniors and caregivers; and demonstrate a model for aging-in-place.

One of the difficulties of the "Village Model" for aging in place is that it has yet to demonstrate financial sustainability and it is limited based on socio-economic status. Many seniors that we serve are living on a Social Security income of \$642 per month and struggle with affordable housing, affordable health care, affordable prescription plans and struggle to afford the prices at area supermarkets. Since September 2008, Emmaus has had to collaborate with other community partners to help seniors stay in their homes – some that have been in their families for six decades. In addition, we have had to helping many stay in compliance with their leases to avoid eviction.

I believe that the Administration on Aging would do well to create collaborative opportunities that bring together grass root organizations (like Emmaus) and national senior serving entities to develop models such as the ICC, which moves beyond culture and socio-economic status and focuses on the well being of the community of older adults. In conclusion, I implore you to be mindful that the Country should not forget it's history, so it is imperative that we not forget about our seniors who are the "Bridge Builders" and "Price Payers" – garnering many of the liberties we enjoy today. There must be a sound and long-term commitment to fund and implement all proposed aspects of investing in the lives of seniors. Remember, as our founder Dr. Arthur S. Flemming would say, "An older person deserves a dream, not just a memory". Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

