



Larry Hogan | Governor Boyd K. Rutherford | Lt. Governor Rona E. Kramer | Secretary

Department of Aging - D26A07 FY 2021 Budget

**Testimony of Rona E. Kramer, Secretary
Maryland Department of Aging**

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee, Capital Budget Subcommittee
February 18, 2020**

**House Appropriations Committee, Capital Budget Subcommittee
February 20, 2020**

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) analysis of the Maryland Department of Aging's (Department's) FY 2021 budget request. The Department's response to the discussion item and the recommendations noted in the analysis are included below.

Discussion Item

The agency should comment on the low number of qualifying applications and the reason that these requests are increasingly for facility renewal.

The Department of Aging administers the Senior Citizen Activities Centers Capital Improvement Grants Program, yet the projects funded are not Department of Aging projects. Rather, they are local government projects and, therefore, the planning of these projects are entirely within the purview of the local governments. The grant parameters require a 50% local contribution, however the Department has no control over the final budgeting of those local funds.

Additionally, the Department has no authority to determine whether the local government chooses to renovate rather than opt for new construction. It has been the Department's impression that it was the will of the Legislature that we support their local governments in their decisions. This includes those decisions where the local government has determined renovation is their most practical solution to maintaining its senior center facilities for use by their senior population.

From FY 2017 through FY 2020, five projects have been authorized for expansion and/or new construction. These projects are located in Howard County, Prince George's County, St. Mary's County, Talbot County, and Washington County. Other projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Carroll County have been facility renewal projects, in which we have a vested interest as a State. Those centers must remain updated, safe, and attractive in order to continue to serve the senior population in those jurisdictions. Furthermore, the statutory language specifically states that an "Improvement" includes the betterment of a senior citizen activities center. Projects replacing roofs, HVAC systems, and outdated and failing plumbing are for the betterment of not only the center, but the population of seniors it serves.

While the Department collects information on anticipated projects, it is only an informal survey. The local governments have the authority to change their capital programs as they see fit. The Department is not involved in those decisions, nor should it be.

Recommended Actions

1.) DLS recommends committee narrative requesting that the agency coordinate a comprehensive building condition assessment of the inventory of senior centers operated by local governments throughout the State to identify opportunities for proactive financial management and attention to maintenance risks that will prevent interruption of services.

The Department opposes this recommendation. This type of assessment would require the extensive cooperation of the local governments, as the management of the senior centers is fully within their prerogative. Such an assessment would require a great deal of work for the locals, who may never request funding for a majority of the senior centers in their jurisdiction. There would have to be a mandate to the local governments to comply.

Further, this is entirely different from what we do in our aging programs, which provide services to older adults across the State. The Department has neither the capacity nor capability in our current staffing to perform such an assessment, as well as lacks the competency in construction and building maintenance for any meaningful analysis. The Department would need to hire a team of staff with a skillset beyond what is currently available within our expertise.

2.) DLS recommends reducing the appropriation by the amount of the unencumbered balance.

The Department opposes this recommendation. The \$300,000 referenced as an unencumbered balance on the worksheets is actually programmed for the Harford Road

Senior Center project located in Baltimore City and was approved by the Legislature in FY 2020. A delay in this project, which is typical in large construction projects, has resulted in the funds not being ready for encumbrance in FY 2020. This does not mean the project has been cancelled. Indeed, the Department is working with Baltimore City to move the project forward and hopes to have it ready for encumbrance in FY 2021.

Unfortunately, due to the delay, the Harford Road Senior Center project is not captured in any other section of the worksheets, which only show the current fiscal year projects and those being requested for FY 2021. Because this project is approved and still in process, the funds should remain allocated to the Harford Road Senior Center project in Baltimore City.

The Department supports full funding in the amount of \$344,000 for the two Baltimore County senior center projects in the FY 2021 recommendation.