

**Testimony before the  
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging  
October 16, 2019**

Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Casey, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. It is an honor to be here.

My name is Virginia Demby. I am 84 years old and a resident of Chester, Pennsylvania. I am a retired nurse and sometimes worked two or three jobs at a time to stay active and make ends meet. I also helped my sister raise her children and helped provide for my family. I'm now retired and live in a senior apartment complex. I use my Social Security and SNAP benefits to make ends meet.

I have always been an active person and I played sports all throughout school as a child. I loved to play basketball, soccer, volleyball, and run track. I carried this love with me throughout my life.

When I worked in healthcare I saw what happened to people as they got older. I saw that it became hard to stay active and keep your mind sharp. When you get up in age, the body changes. And, your thinking may change. But I also learned that a lot of those things don't have to happen. You can avoid them if you keep your mind and body active, that is why I stay active in my community.

I do have some health problems that challenge me. I've had a knee replacement, I have fibromyalgia, glaucoma and low vision. Because of my fibromyalgia I spent eight years in a wheelchair, but I didn't let it slow me down. I told the doctors I was going to walk again, and I made it happen.

Through COSA, Delaware County Pennsylvania's Area Agency on Aging, I learned about a class being offered at my local Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired to prevent falls, called Healthy Steps for Older Adults. Because I have always been so active and know the importance of physical activity, I decided to attend the class. I had also fallen in the past and wanted to make sure I prevented this from happening again.

At the class, I learned about my individual risk of falls after the instructor conducted a series of assessments. I liked this because I knew the information was about me personally and not just general information about the risk for all older adults. After learning about my risk level, we spent time learning about ways we could reduce our risk and prevent falls. This part of the course was such a blessing because it gave me the tools and information I needed to take charge of my own physical health. We talked about how to strengthen my heart, my lungs, my joints, and my bones. I learned how to improve my mood and energy. We also learned about things you can do around the house to make it safer and how important it is to eat healthy food. I knew a lot of this information because I was a nurse, but it was good reinforcement.

After taking the class, I wondered what other classes were out there and I started taking all sorts of other classes such as Tai Chi, kickboxing, yoga, Zumba, line-dancing, weight-lifting, and more. These exercise classes are taught in many different places and I take the bus to get to them. I am thankful for public transit because without that I could not get to these classes.

It is not just through the classes where I stay active. I met other people in the classes and we would do the exercises together. We bonded. Then after the classes ended we would meet and go on walks together. We socialize now. And I encourage them to do more and stay active.

I think it is so important that older adults stay active, stay engaged, and stay physically and mentally healthy. My older sister was 94 and she passed away just a few months ago. We were close and looked out for each other. She had arthritis and had problems walking. I encourage everyone to be involved and be more active both physically and mentally.

And now I'm working with Ellen at COSA to help her spread the word about the fall prevention classes. I help make connections for her in the community so she can teach the classes at different places and for different groups. I live in low-income senior housing and so many people where I live don't get out. They are sedentary. I want to help Ellen get these classes offered in these senior apartments. I promised her I would help her get it done. And I will. I know not everyone can do all of the things I do, but even mild exercises, easy things, can make a difference.

Classes like Healthy Steps for Older Adults are so important for seniors. It gives them the opportunity to keep their bodies and minds healthy. It helps them take care of themselves so they don't fall. It also helps them stay social and get out. I hope more of these classes are made available and more older adults can access them.

Related to that, I know the committee released a comprehensive report on falls prevention. I applaud the committee for releasing it and I fully support the report's recommendations. I can only do so much in the community to encourage people to stay fit and active. This is the reason that I support a national education campaign so more adults can access these classes. Funding to implement existing programs and ensuring continued development of evidence based programs is crucial.

Through conversations that I have had, I understand that Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Casey are helping to lead the charge to reauthorize the programs funded through the Older Americans Act. This is so important. I'd like to thank Senator Casey, in particular, for his work to ensure that the reauthorization bill includes policies to ensure more evidence-based programs for older adults are developed, tested, and disseminated. Evidence based programs work. I am proof.

Thank you for the invitation to testify before the Committee today and for your support of the Older American's Act which provides funding for programs like these for older adults. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.