

Prepared Statement of Diane Dickerson
CEO, Bangor Regional YMCA
Before the
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging
September 25, 2019

Good Morning. Thank you. Chairman Collins and ranking member Casey, for the honor of speaking to you today on a subject that is professionally and personally near and dear to my heart.

As the proud CEO of the Bangor Region YMCA, I am honored each and every day to serve the needs of our entire community, from babies to seniors. It is joyous to see our multi-generational efforts at our Y and watch a 2-year-old shuffle across our lobby to the pool for a swim class, while passing a 92-year-old shuffling the other way to a chair yoga and balance class. The Y as an organization is most recognized as an advocate for our children across the globe, and that assessment is very true. Our three areas of focus are Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility. So, of course, we are well-known for our youth programs such as Early Childhood Education, Before and After School, Youth Sports and Activities, Camps, Teen Centers and much more. But what is less known, and what I want to focus on today, is our concentration on Healthy Living and Social Responsibility as it is linked to our senior population.

Maine is the oldest state in the country, so all of our YMCAs throughout the state have a social responsibility to serve the needs of our senior community. Our Y serving the Bangor region is focused on the mental, physical, and spiritual side, and how all are inter-connected to the healthy aging process. We formulate programs that are designed to stimulate all three factors because we absolutely know that each is needed to positively impact the aging process. We have more than 100 group fitness classes a week on land and in the pools that will keep our seniors feeling physically healthy, increase strength, improve mobility, balance and flexibility, decrease stress, and encourage a strong social network. Our Senior Friendly classes are at levels of intensity appropriate for older adults and our

trainers and instructors are well-suited to modify specific exercises appropriate for an individual's conditioning level.

We also offer programs for individuals with specific conditions. Our Phase III Cardiac Rehabilitation Program is a community-based program in partnership with Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center and is for those who have been affected by a cardiac event and is designed to further improve strength, aerobic capacity, flexibility, and overall movement for participants. Our instructors are CPR/AED certified and are assisted by volunteer medical professionals who are ACLS-certified.

In cooperation with the LIVESTRONG Foundation, Y-USA has developed an evidence-based fitness program to promote the importance of physical activity after a cancer diagnosis. This 12-week program is led by specifically trained instructors to individualize the training regime for each participant. This is a free program for the 12 weeks, and then they can join the Y at a discount to continue their efforts.

For those seniors suffering with arthritis or similar conditions that may limit movement, our joint venture class and others are carefully designed to reduce pain and increase range of motion through all the joints in the body in an effort to improve overall wellness.

Our Peddle for Parkinson's and other carefully choreographed programs allow those with this debilitating disease to be active, stimulate movement, increase balance, and help live as normal a life as possible.

And, our newest addition that is in the development stage is one near and dear to my heart and that is our Alzheimer's Program. We are in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association of Maine and Jackson Lab who is doing amazing research on the Alzheimer's process. We will be introducing in 2020 The Bangor Region Y's Brain Health Initiative. This program will be designed to help the person afflicted with this disease, as well as their caretakers and families. I know first-hand how devastating this disease is to a family. I lost my mom six months ago to this disease. The truth is, I really started losing her six years ago when Alzheimer's took away the strongest, kindest, funniest, and most engaging person I ever knew, and was so blessed to call her my mom.

All of the above health initiatives, however, cannot stand on their own. We must have the social and educational component to our efforts in order to serve our seniors to the maximum degree. That is why we have created our SECOND WIND SOCIAL CLUB, which organizes and initiates lots of social gatherings and excursions for our aging friends. We have potluck dinners and movie nights. We have arts and crafts, bingo, card playing, book clubs and more. We do excursions to national and state parks, as well as special plays, concerts, and seasonal events. We have monthly seminars covering topics of interest such as nutrition for older adults, and specific nutrition courses for those afflicted with certain diseases and ailments. We partner with our Bangor Historical Society to provide historical tours, lectures, and events. And, most recently, we became the Home of our Senior College of Maine to hold classes and training of all types for our senior community.

We also know that many seniors, especially those whose families are not close by, want to have a sense of being needed and playing an important role in the lives of others. I can certainly say that every one of our senior members play a huge role in my life and the lives of my staff just through their wisdom, joy of being at the Y and a part of our Y family, and watching their interaction with each other and our children of all ages. Therefore, we created a volunteer program that provides our aging adults to read to children in our Early Childhood Education Program, or teach a skill to our Middle School Clubs, or mentor a teen in need at our Teen Center. The benefits of these multi-generational efforts are huge on both ends of the spectrum, from the child or teen receiving the support to the senior providing it which fills their heart and spirit.

We at the Y believe that aging is not losing your youth, but rather a new stage of opportunity and strength. Plato said, "He who is of a calm and happy nature, will hardly feel the pressure of age." It is our goal to make the aging population of our wonderful state calm and happy at our Ys so they will not just feel the pressure of age, but will relish and flourish, will move and dance, will laugh and learn, and most of all, they will know how important they are to all of us who are so proud to call them Family at our Y.

Thank you for you listening.