



## Longfellow/Seward Healthy Seniors

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### Written Testimony for HF 1851 – Human Services Finance Committee - March 22, 2023 – 1:00 PM Ahmed Yusuf, Somali Elders Coordinator for Longfellow/Seward Healthy Seniors

Dear Chair Noor and Human Services Finance Committee Members,

My name is Ahmed Yusuf, I am the Somali Elders Coordinator for the Longfellow/Seward Healthy Seniors (LSHS) program. Our community outreach, health promotion and individual support services helps seniors live independently in their homes and stay connected to their communities. We serve over 500 older adults and caregivers in our Minneapolis neighborhoods which includes a large Somali elders population.

We are one of 32 small non-profits in the statewide Living at Home Network that operate under a model that draws local resources, including community volunteers, to help older adults stay living at home. Funding from Live Well at Home grants is critical to our program.

I was hired in 2020 to enhance our services to Somali elders. When I started, COVID had hit and Somali elders were isolated, running out of food and supplies and they did not have access to normal things we all have access to. Some did not have family to help them, and those who did were often afraid to have them visit. We organized deliveries of culturally specific food, masks and hand sanitizer, and personal care products.

Most of the Somali elders we serve are in their 70s and 80s and have been in the U.S. for less than 10 years. Imagine fleeing a civil war in your country of origin, then relocating to a whole new country, a whole new culture, not knowing the language, having limited mobility and feeling isolated and fearful. Many Somali elders are behind on medical needs, not able to navigate the healthcare system. Somali elders are often the last to know what services can help them.

My job is to help connect Somali elders with the help they need. Since LSHS is a community-based program for several Minneapolis neighborhoods, they knew the importance of having a staff person who is from the community to be served. The help we give includes:

- A trusted resource to read mail, explain letters from the County, and help figure out what needs to be done. When I arrive at the building, I am greeted by people holding their mail and big smiles.
- A way to get culturally specific food such as camel, goat and dates. We take the orders of what people want and they can count on the food boxes that we arrange from a neighborhood Somali market. We also deliver personal hygiene products boxes. Each box has a traditional Somali wooden toothbrush.
- Building trust for Somali elders to come to the “Nurse Is In” Clinics that LSHS brings to high rise buildings in the neighborhood. High blood pressure is a serious problem for Somali elders. Talking with the nurse and getting their blood pressure checked and learning about the numbers is lifesaving.
- Reaching out, building relationships and talking about resources and services. I listen to each person’s needs and connect them with what will help. For example, we have built a relationship with an adult daycare that our elders now trust and use.

We have worked hard to earn the trust of Somali elders. For them to open up for us was massive.

This kind of community specific care offered by LSHS, and all the other Living at Home programs in our state, is what makes our small programs so effective. We know our community and our seniors and what they need to stay healthy and independent at home. They trust us. Our program is their program.

Please support HF 1851 to increase funding to community-based programs so seniors can get the kind of care they need to stay healthy and at home.

Thank you, Ahmed Yusuf,  
Somali Elders Coordinator, Longfellow Seward/Healthy Seniors

*MISSION: To enable community seniors to live healthy, independent, and socially connected lives.*