

# Georgia Council on Aging Annual Report Fiscal Year 2009



## Executive Report

During state fiscal year 2009, the Council continued the vital work of advocacy for seniors and aging services and launched a new initiative known as *Georgia for a Lifetime*. The Georgia General Assembly passed legislation to facilitate the activities connected with Georgia for a Lifetime and to authorize the Council to prepare reports concerning Georgia's response to the demographic shift created by the aging of the population.

The Council welcomed new appointee Robyn Berger and two new staff. Kathryn Fowler began work as the Council's Executive Director, and Abby Cox began as the Aging Services Coordinator. Eric Ryan continued as Public Relations Specialist. Both Melanie McNeil, former Executive Director, and Matthew Malok, former Aging Services Coordinator, provided support and counsel throughout the year to ease transition and assure that the staff support of the Council's work continued without pause.

The economy was an overriding concern throughout the year, impacting aging services and older adult supports as state revenues faced historic lows and reductions were made to state services by the Governor in August, 2008, by the legislature during the winter, and again by the Governor in June, 2009. The Council and CO-AGE continued our tradition of advocating with public policy makers to educate them about the need for programs and services for older Georgians especially in times of rising consumer prices, falling state revenues and state budget cuts. The Council's mission is to advocate with and on behalf of older Georgians and their families by establishing and influencing aging policies for Georgia. Our goal is to promote a healthy and satisfying long life for all Georgians. With change comes new ways to fulfill our mission and to meet our goals.

Cheryll Schramm, Chair



Kathryn D. Fowler, Executive Director



## The Mission of the Georgia Council on Aging

The Georgia Council on Aging (GCoA) was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1977 to advise state government about issues of concern to older Georgians, to educate, advise, inform and make recommendations concerning programs for Georgia's elderly and to advocate with and on behalf of older Georgians and their families.

Council members are appointed by the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services. The Council has twenty members, including ten consumers at least 60 years of age and ten service providers. Members are chosen to represent all older Georgians. They are selected to ensure that minorities, low-income, rural, urban, and public and private organizations are included.

### Council Members

Cheryll Schramm, *Chair*  
Kay Hind, *Vice Chair*  
Carleen Cumberbatch, *Secretary  
and Policies & Procedures Chair*  
Stelling Nelson, *Treasurer*  
Karen Bacheller, *Legislative Co-Chair*  
Robyn Berger  
Joe Harris, Ph. D., *Education Chair*  
Rachel Hilliard, *Senior Week Chair*  
Gwen Knight  
David L. Levine, Ph. D.  
Edison McDonald  
L. Bruce Nance  
Melba Paulk-Veazey, *CO-AGE Chair*  
Jeffrey L. Riddle, Esq  
Ann G. Williams, *Legislative Co-Chair*

### Council Staff

Kathryn D. Fowler,  
*Executive Director*  
Abby G. Cox  
*Aging Services Coordinator*  
Eric Ryan  
*Public Relations Specialist*



## GCoA Activities

### Advocacy efforts included:

- Recommending legislation
- Developing and presenting testimony at public hearings
- Training advocates across the state
- Providing leadership to the Coalition of Advocates for Georgia's Elderly
- Providing leadership to the Georgia for a Lifetime initiative which will make recommendations to the Governor and legislators concerning the aging of Georgia's population

### Education activities included:

- Seminars to increase public awareness of aging issues
- Presentations to legislative and community groups concerning aging issues
- Encouragement of gerontology education in the state's universities, colleges, vocational and public schools
- Georgia for a Lifetime seminars, symposia and reports providing research, best practices, and "tools" for meeting the challenges and opportunities presented by Georgia's growing aging population

### Service activities included:

- Interaction with state departments regarding their plans and programs on aging
- Networking and collaboration with other organizations
- Representing older adults by serving on committees and task forces
- Technical assistance to local communities in planning for the aging of their residents





## GCoA Events

The Council organizes events which engage senior advocates and which publicly recognize their efforts.

*Senior Week at the Capitol* brings senior advocates from across the state together with their legislators during the General Assembly session.

*The Distinguished Older Georgian of the Year*, recognized by the Legislature during Senior Week, is an individual 85 years of age or older who has rendered service on a community, state or federal level, is recognized as a role model for positive aging, and has demonstrated a life work of great benefit to a large number of people, or has made some significant contribution to society through occupational or volunteer efforts.

The *Vita R. Ostrander Advocacy Award* recognizes an older volunteer engaged in statewide advocacy.

The *Martha Eaves Advocating for Positive Change Awards* recognize older advocacy volunteers within each of the state's 12 Area Agency on Aging regions.

*Outstanding Legislator and Special Legislative Awards* recognize legislators and members of the legislative staff who have worked tirelessly on aging issues or given special support to aging advocates.

*Quarterly meetings of the Coalition of Advocates for Georgia's Elderly* to prioritize issues, recommend legislation, train advocates, and support their efforts.

### Martha Eaves Advocating for Positive Change Award

*Council member Kay Hind (far right) recognizes Award winners in Albany, April, 2009.*



#### Award winners

Dot Benson, Atlanta Regional Commission

Nancy Carter, Southern Crescent  
Maggie Gantt, Central Savannah River Area

Ronald Jarvis, Lower Chattahoochee

Alberta Mabry, Coastal Georgia

Roy Mosley, Heart of Georgia Altamaha

Georgia Smith, Middle Georgia

Col. James Taylor, SOWEGA

Dr. Dorothy Dye, Southeast Georgia

Lucille Law, Northeast Georgia

## GCoA Committees

The work of the Council is often accomplished in committees. Each Council member served on one or more committees which implemented their work plan developed in April, 2007, and updated during the year. The standing Committees include Legislative, CO-AGE, Education, and Senior Week. The Executive Committee, consisting of officers and committee chairs, supported staff in conducting the business of the Council between quarterly meetings. Ad hoc committees which were active during the year were Policy and Procedures, chaired by Carleen Cumberbatch, and Nominating, chaired by Dr. David Levine.

### *Legislative Committee*

Ann Williams and Karen Bacheller co-chaired this very active committee which worked to pass the CO-AGE legislative and budget issues and to respond to the difficult economic situation. Legislative issues include creation of a Department of Aging sponsored by Rep. Len Walker and the Parent Protection Act sponsored by Rep. Roger Bruce. Funding issues included increased support for Community Care and Home and Community Based Services Programs and financial support for grandparents raising grandchildren. However, numerous reductions in funding for aging services became the critical issue in August 2008, and continued throughout the year.

The Legislative Co-Chairs lead efforts during the fall to meet with legislators and secure sponsorship of legislation and support for service funding. They attended the 2009 General Assembly session daily with staff and were joined by other Council members and volunteers to monitor issues, testify at committee meetings and advocate for our priorities as well as to support and encourage CO-AGE participants in their advocacy efforts.

Between July and October, the Legislative Committee worked with the CO-AGE committee and participants to develop the legislative and budgetary priorities. Between October and January, the legislative committee worked with the CO-AGE committee in preparing CO-AGE participants to advocate for our priorities during the General Assembly session. Council members also monitored and provided input to legislative committees meeting between General Assembly sessions.



## CO-AGE Committee

The CO-AGE committee, chaired by Melba Paulk-Veazey, convened four successful quarterly meetings around the state to choose legislative and budget priorities, develop those priorities into action and evaluate the success of our efforts. CO-AGE advocates had a high profile at the capitol this year. From advocating every day of the session for our priorities, to testifying at committee meetings, to collaborating with special interest groups, advocates were in action.

## Senior Week Committee

Rachel Hilliard chaired the committee in coordinating the 2009 Senior Week at the Capitol. Senior Week is possible because of many volunteers who provide assistance with coordination, physical logistics, food services, registration, exhibitions, hosting senior groups, and connecting seniors with their legislators.

The theme for this year was '*Be There 4 Seniors.*'

Representative Len Walker (107<sup>th</sup>) and Senator Renee Unterman (45<sup>th</sup>) sponsored House and Senate Resolutions, which acknowledged the contributions of senior Georgians and established February 24 - 26, 2009 as "Senior Week at the Capitol." Approximately 600 seniors came from all over Georgia to speak to their legislators, take part in the legislative updates on the CO-AGE priorities, advocate for the priorities, and meet and take pictures with their legislators. The event included aging organizations providing displays in the south end of the Capitol. Council members, staff, volunteers, and seniors wore stickers supporting the "*Be There 4 Seniors*" campaign which strongly emphasized the importance and urgency of maintaining critical services and avoiding funding cuts detrimental to seniors.

Representative Elly Dobbs (53<sup>rd</sup>) honored the life of Ms. Lithangia S. Robinson with a House Resolution recognizing Senior Week in her memory. Ms. Robinson was not only a dependable member of the Georgia Council on Aging but also a tireless advocate at the Capitol on behalf of seniors during Senior Week.



Representative Keith Heard (114<sup>th</sup>) and Senator Bill Cowser (46<sup>th</sup>) recognized Dr. David L. Levine as the Distinguished Older Georgian for 2009. Dr. Levine was recognized for his exemplary service not only as a dedicated member of the Georgia Council on Aging but also for his tenacious service in the elderly community and college and university community. (Dr. Levine 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right; Rep. Heard far right in the photo)

## *Education Committee*

Under the guidance of Chair Dr. Joseph Harris, GCoA provided advocacy training to several senior groups and aging network training sessions co-sponsored by the local Area Agencies on Aging to share ideas and strategies for aging advocacy success. As Georgia for a Lifetime was an educational priority this year, the Council participated in developing a Livable communities track for the Georgia Gerontology Society Annual Conference.

The Education Committee also worked with the staff to invite speakers to Council meetings to provide education to our Council members on specific topics which will assist their advocacy and decision-making as they seek to advise the state on aging issues and services.

## *Participating with State Agencies*

In addition to Committee work, Council members further the Council's missions through other service. Members attended board meetings for the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Department of Community Health (DCH) to monitor the activities of the departments relative to older Georgians. Council members also provided testimony to DHR regarding the state budget for aging programs and coordinated with other aging advocates to testify about the needs of older adults.

Council members also served as GCoA representatives on other committees:

- Money Follows the Person - implementing a grant to help move older adults from nursing homes back to the community,
- Disability Network - for the benefit of both older adults and persons with disabilities,
- Long Term Care Ombudsman Advisory Council - encouraging quality improvements in nursing homes, and
- Mental Health and Aging - improving the mental health system, among others.





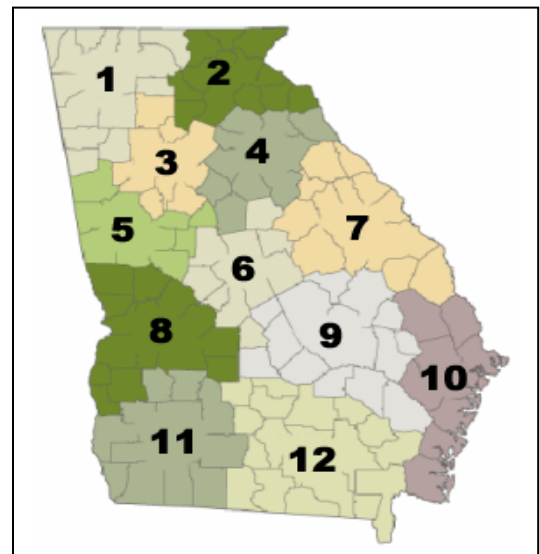
The Ad Hoc committee created at the Council's annual planning meeting in April 2007, was replaced in early Fiscal Year 2009 by an Advisory Committee and a Campaign Cabinet, comprised of Council members and community representatives. Passing legislation to charge the Council with creating the Georgia for a Lifetime initiative had been a priority and was achieved in April 2008, with some funding support from the General Assembly. In order to carry out the work of the initiative, GCoA established a private non-profit entity, *Georgia for a Lifetime, Inc.* which was incorporated in April, 2009.

The initiative was developed to include research, technical assistance, education, and statewide and local implementation. With the counsel of Coxe Curry and Associates and the support of the campaign cabinet and a statewide advisory committee, efforts were begun to raise nearly \$1 million for full funding. The Georgia Division of Aging Services and Area Agencies on Aging provided solid initial financial support for technical assistance at the local level, and conversations were held with the private philanthropic community and community leaders.

A research consortium was formed with the University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Georgia Technical Institute, AARP, and Morehouse University School of Medicine, and compilation of known, current, and pertinent research was completed in order to prepare the preliminary report and to identify gaps in knowledge. Several community training events were held throughout the state, and technical assistance began with a presentation on Georgia for a Lifetime to the Annual Regional Development Center Conference.

In May, 2009, Georgia for a Lifetime issued a call for proposals to award up to four community seed grants to fund implementation projects and further research. Plans were also underway for a Statewide Symposium *Creating Communities for a Lifetime: Opportunities and Challenges for Georgia* in December 2009, to release the interim report to the Governor, legislature, local elected and planning officials, and state government officials.

GA Area Agency on Aging Regions



## GCoA Publications

*Fact Sheets and information toolkits* are produced for each CO-AGE legislative and budget issue for advocates' use in their work with legislators.

*Legislative Bulletins* are published for CO-AGE participants to keep them informed about legislative work and advocacy needs.

*Senior Issues Newsletters* are published weekly during the General Assembly session and monthly thereafter in collaboration with the Georgia Gerontology Society and the Georgia Association of Area Agencies on Aging, informing subscribers of legislative actions, budget status, state board hearings, and other aging services and issues.

*Brochures* for GCoA, CO-AGE, and Georgia for a Lifetime are developed and distributed.

*The GCoA website* was modernized this year and includes more interactive opportunities for advocates as well as CO-AGE meeting schedules, the most recent newsletters and publications, and advocacy alerts. Visit us as [www.gcoa.org](http://www.gcoa.org).

## Partnership with Universities

GCoA staff made educational presentations to Gerontology Certificate classes and Social Work classes at Georgia State University and to the Gerontology Certificate class at Kennesaw State University.

GCoA also provides opportunities for University interns to assist with researching issues; prepare fact sheets, brochures and other training materials; coordinate meetings and training sessions; attend legislative meetings and monitor legislation; participate in staff, coalition and council meetings; and update and maintain databases.

This year, GCoA hosted three graduate students:

- Will Bours, Master of Public Health, Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University
- Kathryn Darden, extern, Georgia State University College of Law
- Caroline Freeman, extern, Georgia State University College of Law





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