



**SANTEE
LYNCHES**

Regional Council of Governments

August 16, 2016

Mark Plowden, Chief of Staff
Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Lieutenant Governor Office on Aging
1301 Gervais Street, Suite 350
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Mr. Plowden:

The true test of any civilization is how a society focuses on those citizens that are most vulnerable: those who are in the dawn of life and those who are in the twilight of life. Upon my appointment as Executive Director of Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments in July of 2013 I had a very instructive conversation with then Lieutenant Governor, Glenn F. McConnell. At the time, he was very focused and energized on promoting his outreach regarding “The Face of Aging,” and I wanted Santee-Lynches to play a leadership role in being nimble, adaptive, and accountable with regards to the “gray tsunami” that was forthcoming in South Carolina. I indicated to the Lieutenant Governor that I had served numerous years with the United States Government Accountability Office and though “I did not have a face that resembled aging; I did have a face that represented accountability.”

Now, we are adrift upon that initial surge of the “gray tsunami” that was looming on the horizon several years ago, and we at Santee-Lynches are dedicated to the proposition of continuous improvement in an effort to better respond to the needs of Americans aged 60 and over in every community we serve. Our Area Agency on Aging (AAA) serves as the essential planning organization to address the needs of the growing older population in Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, and Sumter Counties. Our AAA does not provide direct services to individuals, but we do provide the planning capacity and accountable assessment process that has been implemented in a way to sustainably keep seniors living independently with dignity and with the highest quality of life possible for their own individual circumstances.

In order to accomplish our mission as a designated AAA it is vital that we continue to build the capacity to assess the needs of our seniors in a progressive, spatial, and strategic way. Prior to our initiative to assume the responsibility and accountability for assessing the needs of our seniors at the AAA level, our region had neither the knowledge nor the capacity to address the increasing demands of our senior population. Some of the unaccountable processes in our region that have been addressed and improved upon include:

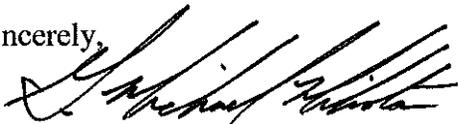
- **Client Selection – Assessment – Provision of Services:** In the past our AAA was tasked with client selection while the local providers acted in the role of assessor and provider of services. Because we were not managing the assessment process we were unable to select the potential clients that were in most need or to even assess the entire needs of the individual. Our new process allows us to administer a consistent initial assessment that

allows us to assess the whole of the individual, and this process allows for a fair process and priority score that objectively determines client selection. This process also allows our providers to concentrate on what they should do best, and we don't do: provide services.

- **Inconsistent Assessments:** Because of the geographic size (approximately the size of the State of Delaware) of our region, and the variety and demands on our providers, the completed assessments in the past were not consistent. Some providers had more resources to devote to assessing individuals while some providers predominantly focused on assessing for services that they were already providing. There were distinct differences and variations in how assessments were compiled, rated, and ranked at the local level, and the differences could not be easily standardized to allow for consistency in service delivery. Now, our assessment team provides a consistent assessment process across the region that is standardized and centralized.
- **Duplication of Assessments:** Because of the way the network was formed in the past the providers that were engaged in assessing the needs of individuals were primarily focused on assessing for the services that they were providing. Additionally, clients who received different services from different providers were being assessed by each provider. Upon our entry into the role of the assessor we discovered that it is very important to undertake an objective assessment when services may be linked to the outcome of that very assessment. By assessing each client for all potential services regardless of provider, we were able to eliminate duplicate assessment, saving money that can then be reinvested into providing broader and better services to our seniors.
- **Regional Needs Assessment:** Because of the change to our consistent and accountable assessment process we can easily identify the true needs in our region and establish baseline measures to track the benefits that may be gained from the services provided.

During the past two years we have worked very diligently to provide an accountable, consistent, and sustainable method to better assess the needs of our senior population at the regional scale. Through our assessment process we have discovered that the needs of our seniors during the initial phases of the "gray tsunami" are broader and more substantial than previously recorded, and we have compiled a wait list of individuals that have needs that are not being met by our current network of providers. Lieutenant Governor McConnell would have loved to have had this type of data to share with the South Carolina legislature back in 2013 during his "The Face of Aging" campaign, and my staff and I are committed to continuing our prevailing assessment process for our region in an accountable and consistent way. Our process permits our region to establish an institutional framework to further build capacity in our provider network in order to meet the daunting challenges of the "gray tsunami" in the most effective and cost efficient way. The senior citizens in our region deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,



G. Michael Mikota, Ph.D.
Executive Director