

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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March 12, 2026  
Start: 12:36 p.m.  
Recess: 4:05 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING  
ROOM 3

B E F O R E: Susan Zhuang, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shirley Aldebol  
Gale A. Brewer  
Eric Dinowitz  
Crystal Hudson  
Darlene Mealy

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Lynn C. Schulman  
Linda Lee

A P P E A R A N C E S

Lisa Scott-McKenzie, Commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging

Jose Mercado, Chief Financial Officer of the New York City Department for the Aging

Catherine Thurston, Chief Executive Officer of Service Program for Older People

Linda Hoffman, President of New York Foundation for Senior Citizens

Marcus Jackson, Director of Advocacy and Government Relations with Encore Community Services

Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP New York

Anita Kwok, Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses

Ines De La Nuez, Director for Grand Street Settlement Grand Coalition of Older Adults

Joseph Rizzi, Director of External Affairs for the Federation of Italian American Organizations of Brooklyn

Abbie Rubin-Pope, Policy and Advocacy Associate at UJA Federation of New York

Catherine Agramonte, In-State Coordinator and Case Manager

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Lydia Ortiz Weiss, self

John Shin, Program Director at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York

Sonia Valentin, self

Christine Tse, self

Vivian Patanio, self

Kalman Bokow, Development Manager at India Home

Sabur Rashid, self

Aaron Tax, SAGE

Jeanette Estima, Director of Policy and Advocacy at City Meals on Wheels

Rihan Wu, Center Director of Homecrest Community Service Older Adults Center

Dr. Cynthia Maurer, Executive Director of Visiting Neighbors

Eustacia Smith, West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing

Hew Rose Evans, American LGBTQ Museum

Elizabeth Lee, Senior Director at Vision Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Kevin Kiprovski, Director of Public Policy at  
Live On New York

John Holt, Director of the Senior Law Project at  
Volunteers of Legal Service

Mamerta Reyes, self

Emily Rios, Managing Director of Community  
Services at Asian Americans for Equality

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, and  
3 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for  
4 the Committee on Aging.

5 If you would like to testify, you must  
6 fill out a witness slip with one of the  
7 Sergeants-at-Arms, even if you signed up already.

8 At this time, please silence all  
9 electronic devices, and no one may approach the dais.

10 Chair, we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: [GAVEL] Thank you.  
12 Good afternoon, I'm Council Member Susan Zhuang. I  
13 serve as the Chair of the Committee on Aging. It's an  
14 honor to be chairing my first budget hearing on the  
15 Fiscal 2027 preliminary budget for the New York City  
16 Department for the Aging, also known as NYC Aging.  
17 Thank you to DFTA's new appointment Commissioner.  
18 Welcome Lisa Scott-McKenzie for joining us.

19 We are joined by Council Member Schulman,  
20 Council Member Aldebol, and that's it, right.

21 Following testimony and the questions  
with NYC Aging, we will hear testimony from the  
public approximately 2:30.

Thank you for the older adults,  
advocates, and the community for joining us today. I

2 will keep my comments here brief and request the  
3 Commissioner keep your oral testimony brief too, so  
4 we can move on the questions from Council Members.

5 I'd like to share we are starting a new  
6 tradition in the Aging Committee, which every single  
7 hearing, we will show a picture of an issue senior  
8 are facing. And today we have the picture of one of  
9 the senior center in NYCHA building from last  
10 testimony. They said, when it's raining outside, it's  
11 pouring inside. Those are the pictures. And the next  
12 time we'll have better board and put behind me. Yeah,  
13 look, there's a hole on the wall, big hole on the  
14 wall. This is the situation our senior are facing  
15 every day.

16 It's essential that we here on Council  
17 and at NYC Aging come face to face with real issues  
18 senior deal with. They affect seniors living every  
19 day. Every day senior and the people who serve them  
20 are forced to exist in those conditions. We must hold  
21 all agencies accountable, not only just NYC Aging.  
So, I committed to you today, we will hold up an  
image at every hearing so no one can deny reality.  
Seeing this will convey the urgency and the  
seriousness of the situation. All the adults and the

1 older adults provider network, we have faced  
2 challenges in the past few years due to the pandemic  
3 and the budgetary constraints as well as inflation  
4 and the increased cost of living. I look forward to  
5 work collaboratively with providers and the  
6 Administration to help city's 1.8 million older  
7 adults overcome those challenges. NYC Aging has a  
8 critical role to play in accessing and meeting the  
9 needs of older adults and collaborating with provider  
10 network. And the City Council, we must harness best  
11 practices and create innovative approach to best  
12 serve our city's growing population of older adults.

13 NYC Aging's Fiscal 2027 preliminary  
14 budget is 573.5 million, which is approximately 32  
15 million less than Fiscal 2026 adopted budget. As the  
16 Council's discretionary initiative funding is not yet  
17 include for Fiscal 2027. Despite serving almost 20  
18 percent of City's population, NYC's budget continues  
19 account for less than 1 percent of City's overall  
20 budget, which is simply not sufficient to meet needs  
21 of our older adults in the city. The preliminary  
budget includes two minor new needs to more  
accurately budget for expected cost for the indirect  
cost rate and the cost for living adjustment for

2 human service contract, but none for director service  
3 or program for older adults. As the Chair of this  
4 Committee, I look forward to working alongside the  
5 Administration to come up with a new way to create,  
6 fund, and implement new and expanded service for  
7 older adults.

8 NYC Aging's capital commitment plan, the  
9 smallest in the City, total 75.9 million over Fiscal  
10 2026 to 2030, which over 300 older adult centers  
11 promising about 40 NORCs in New York City Aging  
12 Network. This funding is insufficient to properly  
13 address all the infrastructure needs. I believe the  
14 capital program would be enhanced to help refurbish  
15 centers, improve kitchens, and connect older adults  
16 to much needed technology and the resources. In  
17 addition, DFTA should advocate for additional capital  
18 funding to be added in HPD's budget to create more  
19 affordable older adult home units across the city.  
20 It's a big priority of mine as older adults are  
21 struggling with rising rents and a lack of accessible  
affordable older adults friendly units across the  
five boroughs.

In today's hearing, we would like to get  
a deeper understanding of NYC Aging's expense budget,

2 its capital plan, the impact of its service, metrics  
3 that are used and the key aging service and the  
4 programs, including case management, home delivery  
5 meals, and the older center programs. We would also  
6 like to devote into metrics reported for NYC Aging in  
7 Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report.

8 I would like to thank Committee Staff who  
9 have helped prepare this hearing, Saiyemul Hamid,  
10 Senior Financial Analyst; Julia K. Haramis, Assistant  
11 Director; Christopher Pepe, Senior Legislative  
12 Counsel; Joshua Newman, Policy Analyst; and my great  
13 Staff, Katelynn Ulrich, Deputy Chief-of-Staff;  
14 Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon, Director of Budget and the  
15 Legislation. I'm sorry if I pronounce anyone's name  
16 not correctly. English is my second language, I have  
17 excuse.

18 I will now pass the mic to Committee  
19 Counsel to administer the oath to members of  
20 Administration.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon. If you could both please  
raise your right hand.

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole  
truth, and nothing but the truth before this

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10

2 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
3 questions?

3 Commissioner.

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chief Financial  
6 Officer.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may proceed with  
9 your testimony.

9 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Absolutely.

10 Thank you.

11 Good afternoon, Chair Zhuang and Members  
12 of the Committee on Aging. I am Dr. Lisa  
13 Scott-McKenzie, the Commissioner of the New York City  
14 Department for the Aging, NYC Aging. Before I go into  
15 my testimony, I have to say, viewing photos like you  
16 showed us a few moments ago as Commissioner, they're  
17 dramatic and deeply disturbing. So definitely, you  
18 will see more from DFTA. Obviously, it's not wholly  
19 our problem, but we will join forces with all the  
20 others, such as NYCHA, to ensure that our older  
21 adults are in safe, functional environments. I have  
pledged to go out to all of the 308 of our centers  
and take a look at what our older adults are

2 experiencing every day. And again, I've said, it's  
3 not the beautiful sights that I want to see first. I  
4 want to go first to those sites that look like what  
5 you just showed us. So, if you would be as kind, we  
6 would definitely invite you also to come along with  
us and advocate for our older adults.

7 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: (INAUDIBLE)

8 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Absolutely.

9 Now I'll move into my testimony. I am  
10 joined this afternoon by Jose Mercado, our Chief  
11 Financial Officer. Thank you for this opportunity to  
12 discuss NYC Aging's preliminary budget for Fiscal  
13 Year 2027, FY27.

14 I'm speaking to you this morning on my  
15 ninth official day as Commissioner for New York City  
16 Aging. I am very excited to serve as the head of this  
17 agency, delivering vital services to nearly two  
18 million New Yorkers over the age of 60. We, of  
19 course, do this through our partnership with hundreds  
20 of contracted providers across a range of programs,  
21 and much of our success is due to the relationship we  
have fostered over the years with these dedicated  
professionals in aging services. I am proud to bring  
my years of experience working at the New York City

Health and Hospitals, most recently as the Chief Operating Officer at Woodhall Hospital in Brooklyn, to this new role. I am committed to bringing the same innovative approach to aging services and pursuit of excellence in the way we serve older New Yorkers to my time as Commissioner. We believe that New York City's older adults have earned the right to age gracefully and with dignity in the communities they have built. Nurturing and fostering that reality for older adults is fundamental to the work of this agency. To support this important work, our FY27 preliminary budget projects 573.5 million in funding, of which 469.5 million is in City funds. This includes allocations to core programs you are all familiar with, including 240.8 million to support older adult centers, 78 million for home-delivered meals, and 47.4 million for case management. The work done by OAC's HDM programs and our CMA providers combat poverty and financial insecurity, while also connecting older adults to in-home services, which addresses their needs when struggling with activities of daily living. There are also allocations of 36.5 million to support home care for homebound older adults who are not Medicaid eligible, which allows

1 older New Yorkers to age in place, and 16.3 million  
2 for NORC programs, which provide similar services as  
3 OAC's, other than meals, for recreation and combating  
4 social isolation, but includes nursing services.  
5 Finally, 14.2 million for caregiver services,  
6 supporting the 1.3 million caregivers and their care  
7 receivers in the city, and 7.1 million for  
8 transportation services, allowing older adults to be  
9 connected to community centers, houses of worship,  
shopping, and medical appointments.

10           These numbers tell only a portion of the  
11 story, beyond the services included at NYC Aging, and  
12 show the human side of what we do to make New York  
13 City fully age inclusive. As this Administration has  
14 made clear, there are key challenges in the City  
15 financially, and NYC Aging is always prepared to  
16 prioritize the needs of older adults and our core  
17 aging services, while limiting the impacts of these  
18 challenges. Nonetheless, we are still keenly aware of  
19 these challenges, which have been exacerbated by  
20 changes to the federal landscape, and the need for  
continued and increased investment from the State to  
21 support the growing number of older adults throughout  
New York. We also continue to advocate that our State

2 and Federal partners share the financial  
3 responsibility of serving older New Yorkers living in  
4 the city.

5 Over the current Fiscal Year, we are  
6 proud of our work, done along with the work of our  
7 non-profit partners, and addressing some notable  
8 recent successes and upcoming items we are looking  
9 forward to. In November of 2025, New York City Aging  
10 celebrated its 50th anniversary. As the largest area  
11 agency on aging in the country, we are proud to be  
12 the first in a number of accomplishments, including  
13 developing the community care plan, creating the  
14 cabinet for older New Yorkers, and utilizing our  
15 platform as an agency to take us from age-friendly to  
16 age-inclusive. New York City Aging's commitment to  
17 service and leadership will build a future where  
18 every New Yorker can age with dignity and respect. In  
19 FY25, New York City Aging once again hit a  
20 post-pandemic record of 10 million meals served to  
21 older New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. This  
includes 6.1 million meals served at the 300-plus  
OACs in the network, and 4.2 million meals delivered  
by our HDM providers. As we have said before, when  
the Older Americans Act was passed more than 60 years

1 ago this July in 1965, a key reason for creating that  
2 pivotal legislation was to address older adult  
3 poverty nationwide through nutrition and supportive  
4 services. While the significance of what it means to  
5 be an older adult may have changed since the 1960s,  
6 the basic human needs for dignified aging, meals,  
7 health, agency, safety, and income remain the same.  
8 Last fall we launched a dynamic Ageism Starts With  
9 You campaign focused on calling out ageism regardless  
10 of age. This means both older and younger New Yorkers  
11 that age discrimination affects us all, this reminds  
12 all of them, and we should call it out, reject it,  
13 and challenge ageism together. This multilingual  
14 campaign is not the only effort our agency has put  
15 forward combating ageism, but is complemented by our  
16 Anti-Ageism High School Resource Guide and the  
17 intergenerational My New York Story campaign. Both  
18 these endeavors have been developed through the  
19 Cabinet for Older New Yorkers and were recognized as  
20 programs of merit by Generations United. We are proud  
21 of the work we are doing to fundamentally push  
against ageism in New York City.

Finally, last July we were pleased to  
release the State of Older New Yorkers report which

1 was developed based on the results of our milestone  
2 service needs assessment administered in 2024. We  
3 have learned much information about the way older  
4 adults perceive their environment and aging in New  
5 York City, and we have learned about the work and  
6 challenges our agency needs to overcome in order to  
7 better meet the needs of older adults. This report  
8 has informed our work and allowed us to develop a  
9 better understanding of what older New Yorkers are  
really experiencing on a daily basis.

10 We are thrilled about these recent  
11 successes and some key programs supported in this  
12 preliminary budget which shape our core services and  
13 improve the lives of older adults in New York City.  
14 Two of New York City Aging's core services are OACs  
15 and the HDM program which are intrinsically connected  
16 to providing meals and nutrition assistance to older  
17 adults. In recent years, we have altered our own  
18 thinking and clearly see congregate or home-delivered  
19 meals as programs which provide food as medicine.  
20 These are essential services for healthy living and  
21 preventing the social isolation that affects older  
adults at a very basic level. This work done by OACs,  
HDM programs, and our CMA providers combat poverty

1 and financial insecurity which address their needs  
2 when struggling with the activities of daily living.  
3 Not only does the HDM program provide meals to  
4 homebound older New Yorkers, their interaction with  
5 the delivery person, which for many of our clients  
6 may be the only direct human interaction for the day,  
7 supports our ongoing effort to combat social  
8 isolation. Again, a critical aspect of our community  
9 care approach. This program continues to follow the  
10 strict guidance set by the State and is open to all  
11 those who meet the criteria.

12 Additionally, because financial  
13 insecurity remains among the most critical needs of  
14 older adults and it is highly correlated to food  
15 insecurity, NYC Aging is continually evaluating our  
16 efforts and exploring areas for improvement. While  
17 workforce programs continue to be a way for older  
18 adults to avoid long-term poverty, meals programs are  
19 a lifeline to older adults struggling with financial  
20 and food insecurity. This includes enhancing meal  
21 options for recipients, embracing the diversity of  
our city by increasing the availability of culturally  
aligned meals, and promoting uniformly high quality  
and nutritious meals. Over the past few years, per

2 meal reimbursement rates have gradually risen to help  
3 meet the needs of our providers serving these  
4 critical needs. These have been key improvements to  
5 service and our providers that we have met through  
6 partnership between the Administration and Council  
7 leadership.

8 As the number of older adults in New York  
9 City continues to grow, it is imperative that we  
10 continue to grow the community care support systems  
11 which allow older New Yorkers to remain in the  
12 communities they built and truly age in place. We do  
13 this through home care and caregiver services which  
14 greatly serve those who are homebound or in need of  
15 additional supports. Home care services are provided  
16 through Medicaid reimbursement and, for those who do  
17 not qualify for Medicaid programs, through the  
18 expanded in-home services for elderly persons, ISEP  
19 program, where case management hours are reimbursed  
20 to providers. Without this, ISEP clients are at a  
21 disadvantage when Medicaid home care workers are  
incentivized to take on those clients because the pay  
is higher. There is no distinction between ISEP and  
Medicaid home care workers. They are primarily women  
of color and this exacerbates inequity because of the

1 salary. Currently, the home care program at New York  
2 City Aging is funded at 36.5 million for FY27. Many  
3 older adults are caregivers for their aging parents  
4 or others. Many are caregivers who also have  
5 full-time jobs. The caregiver program offers options  
6 for respite care through home care or participation  
7 in social adult daycare. There are an estimated 1.3  
8 million New Yorkers who function as a caregiver. We  
9 know that the cost of maintaining an older adult in  
10 institutionalized care is far higher when compared to  
11 the cost of community care options such as supporting  
12 caregivers. We know that it costs on average 160,980  
13 dollars to house an older adult in institutionalized  
14 care, whereas the average cost of community care  
15 services is roughly 32,000 per person per year. In  
16 FY27, funding for the caregiver program is currently  
17 projected to be 14.2 million. We are additionally  
18 excited to announce that a citywide caregiver  
19 campaign just launched today and will help to educate  
20 New Yorkers about this incredibly important program  
21 at NYC Aging. Caregiver supports positively impact  
the health and well-being of older adults while  
aligning with the cultural background of the  
individual. This is why community care is so

2 incredibly important to the future of older New  
3 Yorkers.

4 As the New York City population ages  
5 rapidly, ensuring older adults can age in place is  
6 paramount. Naturally occurring retirement communities  
7 are a vital piece of the community care puzzle.  
8 Through contracted providers, New York City Aging  
9 currently funds 36 NORCs across the city, delivering  
10 essential social services directly to where older  
11 adults live. NORC programs are uniquely positioned  
12 within people's homes and communities, offering  
13 services distinct from traditional older adult  
14 centers. Just like caregiver supports, NORCs are a  
15 fundamentally sound investment in community care that  
16 saves the City money while improving lives. NORC  
17 staff also intervene early to prevent the negative  
18 impacts that lead to costly institutionalization.  
19 Beyond healthcare, they empower older adults to  
20 advocate for their daily living needs. Currently, the  
21 NORC program is funded at 16.3 million in New York  
City. Because they are embedded in the community,  
NORC staff provide vital healthcare management to  
address long-term housing issues. These are key  
interventions that prevent older adults from being

1 forced into institutional care. Just this year, the  
2 Governor's 2026 State of the State Address  
3 underscored the immense value of this model by  
4 proposing to double State investments in NORCs to 16  
5 million. This commitment highlights the immense  
6 impact that this program has, and we know that  
7 Council has contributed discretionary funds to NORC  
8 programs as well in the past years. These integrated  
9 services keep older New Yorkers safely in the  
10 communities they help build, which is their  
11 overwhelming preference. Maintaining and expanding  
12 NORC funding is essential to our shared goal of  
13 making New York City a truly age-friendly city, and  
14 we welcome your continued advocacy and investment in  
15 these critical community anchors.

16 In conclusion, I continue to be proud of  
17 the great work that NYC Aging and our providers  
18 accomplish with our resources. This past year has  
19 shown where NYC Aging is prepared to prioritize vital  
20 programs that truly meet the needs of older New  
21 Yorkers and continue to advocate for innovations in  
aging services which look to the future. Even in the  
face of challenges, we continue to be good stewards  
of public dollars. That said, given the need for

2 further investment from our State and Federal  
3 partners, we continue to be concerned about the  
4 current uncertainty and what changes may affect NYC  
5 Aging. It is imperative now more than ever that New  
6 York City receive its fair share of aging services  
7 funding, and that federal grants continue to be  
8 dispersed for these vital programs and services. We  
9 are grateful to the chairs and committee members for  
10 your ongoing advocacy and continued partnership to  
11 support older New Yorkers. Thank you for your time  
12 today, Mr. Mercado, and I'm happy to answer any  
13 questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you,  
15 Commissioner. And then we just joined with us Council  
16 Member Brewer. Congratulations.

17 We're going to move to Q and A portion of  
18 this hearing.

19 Congratulations, Commissioner, again. I  
20 enjoyed the conversation we had yesterday. I'm  
21 excited to work with you, but a lot of people still  
don't know yet. I'm going to ask the question again.  
What's your priority for the agency?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, we  
have taken an overall look at the agency. Obviously,

2 again, it's my ninth day, so there's a lot still to  
3 be uncovered, but we found that we really have a  
4 great mission-driven agency that has done great work  
5 in partnership with this Council, so we want to thank  
6 you so much for all that you've done and how you've  
7 supported the work that we do. But as far as some of  
8 our changing mission, we are looking at ageism, and  
9 we know that ageism has been at the foundation of all  
10 the work that's been done over the last few years,  
11 but now we're starting to realign and recognizing  
12 that today, folks are dealing with, and especially  
13 our older adults, are dealing with the real meat and  
14 potatoes issues of food insecurity, of a safe place  
15 to live, an affordable place to live, and especially  
16 providing the best environment possible when we do  
17 have places like our OACs where it should be an area  
18 of respite for our older adults. Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also, like you  
20 just said, OAC, this OAC is in NYCHA building. What's  
21 your plan to work with other agency? Because like the  
last testimonies we have advocate told us, this  
situation, it's raining outside, it's pouring inside,  
and they see NYCHA building. NYCHA building doesn't

2 let the OAC fix the issue. What's your plan to  
3 working with other City agencies?

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well,  
5 exactly as you've said, we definitely need to partner  
6 better with NYCHA, and we will do that. I know that  
7 we have an escalation process right now where you  
8 have a ticket, and we do have a liaison that works  
9 along with us, but I'd like us to really advocate a  
10 lot more strongly that these environments are looked  
11 at immediately. We are not a capital agency, as you  
12 all know, but we can make use of monies that we may  
13 have that are due to overspending and others to be  
14 able to effect some of these repairs. And of course,  
15 NYCHA, as one of the City agencies, I'm sure that  
16 they're eager to help us solve this problem so we  
17 will work with them and whatever other agencies we  
18 need to in order to make sure that we don't have  
19 centers that look like this.

20 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. And also,  
21 second question. Older adults represent about 20  
percent of city's population. 2021 CUNY Graduate  
Center study report that the population of older  
adults age 65 and older in New York State will  
increase to 25 percent between 2021 and the 2040. In

2 the city alone, population of older adults will be  
3 increased by 40 percent by the year 2040. This is a  
4 big increase. What metrics does NYC aging track or  
5 monitor regarding older adults population growing,  
6 demanding more programs and more service?

7 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, we are  
8 looking at metrics, and I'm sure Jose may want to add  
9 some things, but we are looking at metrics that help  
10 us to identify the total number of folks that would  
11 need our assistance. Of course, allowing there to be  
12 some overflow because we do recognize that there are  
13 folks that we may not know about that are 60 and  
14 older that will enter some of our centers and require  
15 additional services as well. So, while I don't have  
16 those numbers in front of me now and I'm happy to  
17 bring them back for our next meeting, we are tracking  
18 the need and meeting the need according to our recent  
19 numbers.

20 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: I'm a data person  
21 also.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Me too.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: So, when the number  
of senior increase, but the percentage of senior also  
increase, but we did not see the percentage of the

2 budget in the City increase. Is there any plan of  
3 increase of percentage of the budget for seniors this  
4 year?

5 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, there  
6 are innovative approaches and, of course, our  
7 partnerships with some of our non-profit agencies as  
8 well to be able to address the needs and properly  
9 assign the needs because through case management, we  
10 should be able to assess our older adults and then be  
11 sure that we're meeting their actual needs and not  
12 all of that is a budget issue. Some of it is budget  
13 neutral. We found through our Cabinet for Older New  
14 Yorkers that we have been able to come up with  
15 approaches that don't cost a lot of money, but  
16 actually increase the service and increase the  
17 offerings of services that we have across the city.

18 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: I'm in the ground  
19 every day. A lot of senior center OACs. They come to  
20 me always say, Susan, we don't have enough budget. We  
21 have to cut this. We have to cut that. And this year  
from the budget so far, I haven't seen increase of  
money for OACs, but I see the cut. Is there any plans  
for OACs for the budget?

2           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Oh, yes. We  
3 did release a concept paper very recently, and we  
4 were waiting for the results of that to get a better  
5 picture of whether or not we do need to make further  
6 adjustments. But I would open the floor and say to  
7 you, please, if you do hear that, I can't speak for  
8 the past, but I can speak for the future. And I'll  
9 say, if you get that, please pass it on to us because  
10 we want to be able to ensure that we're meeting the  
11 needs and, if there are ways that we can look at our  
12 budget and use it in a different way to meet those  
13 needs, we're willing to do so.

14           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: That's great to hear.  
15 Probably you're going to have a full list.

16           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Good. We've  
17 got lots of work to do.

18           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And we just joined by  
19 Council Member Hudson and also our Finance Chair Lee.

20           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Good. Hi.  
21 How are you?

          CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: For the Mayor's  
saving exercise, did we have any idea what Aging NYC,  
DFTA, able to save and what area they're going to  
save? For me, I see DFTA already don't have enough

2 funding. How are we going to save more? Which area  
3 that you guys going to look at it to save?

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Hi. So,  
5 we're currently looking at ideas so we're still  
6 working through that.

7 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: (INAUDIBLE)

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No.  
9 That's kind of -- again, we're still reviewing what  
10 we have. Like Commissioner mentioned earlier, we're  
11 looking at all our budgets, reviewing them so  
12 currently we have made no decisions regarding any  
13 savings at this point in time.

14 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And we  
15 really want to be very thoughtful in this process.  
16 Because again, we don't have an infinite budget, no  
17 one does. But we want to be sure that we're meeting  
18 the needs and we're meeting our older adults where  
19 they are and our providers to be sure that what we  
20 are funding, we're funding the right things. And if  
21 there's something that we can draw back on, that  
we're drawing back on the right issues.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And we also hear  
going to end a two-for-one hiring policy. But it was  
a concern to hear that agencies will only permit to

2 fill half of their vacancies. With senior growing, I  
3 don't know what's the situation with DFTA.

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, I'm  
5 happy to say that at this point, we only have two  
6 positions that have been approved by OMB that we're  
7 actively hiring for at this point so we're doing  
8 quite well with our staffing, and our vacancy rate  
9 right now is two percentage points lower than it was  
10 last year so we're doing well for now and we will  
11 continue to monitor.

12 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay. I still have a  
13 lot of questions, but I want to let my Colleagues ask  
14 a question first, then we'll go back to my questions.

15 We have Council Member Schulman and then  
16 followed by Council Member Brewer.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very  
18 much, Chair, and welcome, Commissioner.

19 So. one of the questions I have is sort  
20 of continue in the vein of Chair. There are  
21 communities like in my District where there are no  
senior centers, and I know in terms of the capital,  
the capital's not there, but in Richmond Hill, there  
is no senior center so what are the plans to deal  
with that?

2           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: I'm so happy  
3 you mentioned that because definitely we want to be  
4 sure that we have centers in areas of need and  
5 underserved communities so it is something that we  
6 will look at and I'd be happy to bring you back some  
7 information on that in the very near future.

8           COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. No, I  
9 appreciate that because there are seniors and they  
10 get together in small groups and they do their own  
11 thing and so they don't have the structure so that's  
12 very important.

13           And also, I would like to also invite you  
14 out to my District. The amenities to some of the  
15 senior centers are not great either in my District.  
16 Not to the extent that you have at NYCHA, but you'll  
17 see. And we have, in my District, we have a lot of  
18 Holocaust survivors and they come for lunches at  
19 different places, and it's just there's stuff coming  
20 off the walls and there's like, the tables are not,  
21 all of that stuff so we should talk about that.

          What kind of meals? And do you have money  
for meals for the seniors? Like, how does that work?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So  
3 currently, so the majority of our OACs basically have  
4 money.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay.

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, they  
6 all have meals, so they get reimbursed based on  
7 specific cost. On average, meal cost is about 5,000  
8 on average. So currently, I mean, so right now, just  
9 so you know, we've provided 3.2 million meals as of  
10 January. So currently, we have no outstanding  
11 invoices for meals at this point in time.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. And the  
12 last question that I have is, what are your plans in  
13 terms of moving? I know you're at Lafayette Street  
14 now, I believe, and you're moving to 14 Wall Street  
15 so can you tell us a little bit about that?

15 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes. First,  
16 I want to take you up on your invitation. You  
17 mentioned that we should go out to your community. So  
18 absolutely, let's plan that as soon as possible. It's  
19 a major priority of mine to see and feel the same  
20 things that our older adults see and feel every day.  
21 And as I've mentioned, I don't just want to see the  
glitzy programs. I actually want to go to those

2 programs where there are real needs so that we can  
3 make a bigger impact when we do correct those issues.

4 But yes, we will be moving in the very,  
5 very near future. There are renovations that will  
6 take place first. It's listed right now as a Mayoral  
7 renovation. So, we're expecting that this will help  
8 us to not only retain the quality, talented staff  
9 that we have right now, but as we move forward and  
10 continue to have needs to attract additional staff,  
11 that will help us as well. We also have several  
12 spaces within our building where we invite our older  
13 adults in for training and for counseling, interview  
14 prep, and other types of services. So we, again, if  
15 it's going to be our overarching goal that we provide  
16 the best spaces, safe, functional, we want to do the  
17 same thing when they're coming over to DFTA.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Is there a  
19 timeline for the move?

20 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, we're  
21 working out the timeline right now --

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: -- so I  
don't want to commit to something that's not in stone  
yet, but it will be in the near future.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And a big issue  
3 for seniors, by the way, I'm one of the handful of  
4 older adults on the City Council so it's important to  
5 me. Loneliness is a big issue for seniors. So, what  
6 plans do you have? I didn't see anything in the  
7 testimony around that issue.

8 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes. Social  
9 isolation, loneliness. Well, the first thing that  
10 we're doing, as I mentioned, in the testimony, you  
11 might not have heard me, but we do have those  
12 congregate settings at all of the OACs so our older  
13 adults do have the chance to network and socialize  
14 and so on, and then some of them don't want to go to  
15 an OAC or maybe they can't get to an OAC so those  
16 home-delivered meals, they do have that consistency  
17 with the driver that's coming every day. They become  
18 accustomed to them and become comfortable. But I am a  
19 technology person. And I do feel at many of our  
20 centers, we have started to train up some of our  
21 seniors to be able to use some of the devices that  
are out there, such as language translation apps,  
which would open the door to additional communication  
and connection and socialization for our seniors. So,  
these are some of the avenues that we're exploring.

2 But again, as I mentioned, we're looking at  
3 innovative approaches. We know that there are several  
4 ways to be able to provide additional services and to  
5 allow that sense of belonging and connection so it is  
6 an area of focus for us.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you,  
8 Chair. Thank you, Commissioner.

9 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: We're also joined by  
11 Chair Mealy.

12 I have a follow-up question. So, Council  
13 Member Schulman already asked for moving. On the  
14 budget, said including moving agent headquarter costs  
15 27.1 million dollars and also for our City agencies,  
16 total funding is 75.9 million for Fiscal 2026 to  
17 2030. So, this is basically half, almost half of the  
18 total budget for City agency for four years. Why this  
19 moving is quite expensive, moving the headquarter?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Hi. So,  
21 yes. So, part of that is renovating the buildings to  
22 ensure that it basically meets the needs of the older  
23 adults, training centers, as well as staff.

24 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Is any bidding  
25 process inside? Who is the landlord? Why this

2 building is so expensive? Basically, it's half the  
3 budget of four years, DFTA, the moving expense.

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: I'd like to  
5 review those numbers again. And if there are changes,  
6 we will be sure to share those with you. But I would  
7 say that it did go through the bidding process. It  
8 went through OMB. So, they've already addressed those  
9 hurdles early on in the process. So, the final  
10 number, and I'm not going to say right now that is  
11 the final number, but we will share that final number  
12 with you, and it was in line with what makes sense  
13 moving an agency of our size and also having to have  
14 those special amenities for our older adults when  
15 they enter our center. It's not just your basic  
16 vanilla box type of movement. These are not just  
17 offices. These are spaces that are designed to  
18 support the work that we do.

19 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: So, this is not the  
20 direct service cost to like similar to senior center.  
21 It's only just moving. We like to see the numbers. I  
think the public also interest to see all the  
numbers.

2 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Okay. We  
3 will definitely bring that back to you. Not a  
4 problem.

5 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you, thank you.

6 And also Council Member Brewer.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
8 much. And it was nice to meet you on your first day  
9 at the encore dinner. That was very special.

10 I have a question about case management  
11 because I know that in many cases that is, I don't  
12 know what the right term, meat and potatoes of some  
13 of these centers and they do never have enough. So,  
14 the PMMR said there was an increase in the number of  
15 clients, I'm sure about that, and increase in case  
16 management hours, and there's a large number of older  
17 citizens who were served, but what is the current  
18 funding amount for case management in your budget for  
19 '26 and for '27, and is there a waiting list for case  
20 management services? I know the answer is yes. And  
21 then how many clients are on that list? And just  
generally, how are you going to address case  
management? That is, like I said, what keeps people  
housed and served and so on. I want to hear more  
about case management.

1 COMMITTEE ON AGING

37

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Hi.

3 Regarding the budget. So, there was actually  
4 additional funding added during the November Plan for  
5 case management, 4 million dollars. So currently our  
6 budget for '26 --

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Can you talk up a  
8 little?

9 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Sorry.  
10 Can you hear me? Can you hear me?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Better.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: All  
13 right. I sound like a Verizon commercial now. But  
14 anyway, with case management, so currently our budget  
15 is 55.5 million dollars which includes that  
16 additional money for that one year.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 35 million you  
18 said?

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 55.5  
20 million.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. 55. All  
right.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
And that is baselined for '27 as well. So now, just

20

21

2 so you know, for example, this does not include any  
3 additional ICR and things of that nature.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And what's the  
5 waiting list? How many more people do you have on the  
6 waiting list?

7 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Okay. So,  
8 right now we have 455 clients that are waiting for  
9 full case management services, which actually is a  
10 decrease of 38 percent from the same time two years  
11 ago.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So, you feel  
13 like there's -- that sounds low but I appreciate that  
14 that's the number that you have. And what do you  
15 consider case management? What do you consider case  
16 management?

17 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, this  
18 would not be an everyday, because we know the ratio  
19 is, the Council has requested a ratio of 65 cases per  
20 caseworker. Right now, we're at 164.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 164?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: So, we're  
just a smidge under, but we are working obviously to

2 make sure that we do reach that target goal that you  
3 have mentioned previously, and this would not include  
4 the day-to-day interaction, of course, one person  
5 with 65 people so case management for us would be  
6 that you do have that social worker that would be  
7 covering 64 cases. That would be their caseload.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I think  
9 that's helpful. More to be discussed.

10 I'm a big supporter of the New York  
11 Foundation for Senior Citizens. We're all trying to  
12 find housing, and they were able to do home sharing  
13 for 100 hosts and guests very recently so I want to  
14 know if that's a program that you think should be  
15 expanded, funded, et cetera. Obviously, the notion  
16 behind it, as you know somebody has vacancy in their  
17 apartment and then they match and it ends up saving  
18 money. Last year, about 1.3 million is what the City  
19 saved. So, I want to know if you know the program, if  
20 you think it should be expanded. It's a great, I  
21 think, model. What do you think?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, thank  
you for sharing that. Again, nine days in. I don't  
want to say it should be expanded or maintained. What  
I'll say is that we will definitely take a deep dive

2 and make sure that this is something that is  
3 meaningful to the organization and meaningful to the  
4 folks that need to use the program and we'll bring  
5 that answer back for you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And the  
7 other thing is hoarders. Hoarders are a big problem  
8 for, talk about case management. That is almost all  
9 by yourself. You have to deal with it. So, my  
10 question is, what are we doing to prevent eviction?  
11 APS is obviously the last resort. Is that something  
12 that's, I know you have a big ageism agenda. I'm like  
13 real granular. So, I have tons of hoarders and we  
14 spend hours. Sometimes we clean them, sometimes we  
15 call APS, et cetera. How is that fitted in?  
16 Unfortunately, they're often older adults.

17 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes. And I  
18 want to just circle back one moment, if you wouldn't  
19 mind, on the case management issue. The number that  
20 we mentioned, this includes individuals that are  
21 waiting for a full evaluation.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: They are  
still receiving services, like home-delivered meals,  
where they qualify in the interim.

2           So, on the issue of hoarders, obviously  
3 we do have a Tenant Eviction Specialist Unit that  
4 would assist with issues like that and, as our case  
5 management workers are working with these older  
6 adults, they also assess if there are environmental  
7 issues where they would need additional assistance.  
8 So, it is something that we are looking at as well.  
9 It is an issue among our older adults, as we know,  
10 because many of them either don't have the resources  
11 or they're not able, they're not bodily able to be  
12 able to do those things on their own.

13           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm just saying, I  
14 think perhaps it's good to be reactive. I'm just  
15 saying, perhaps look at some of the dockets at  
16 housing court, something to be more proactive so we  
17 don't want them to lose their homes. You know,  
18 they're going to end up in shelter. So, I would love  
19 to see that.

20           Just finally on SCRIE, we love SCRIE. We  
21 work with Finance. We have somebody there every week  
helping tenants. However, due to memory loss and so  
on, people don't get their forms in, they don't do  
the lease right, the owner doesn't, loves to not  
pretend or pretend they doesn't know about the lease

2 renewal, et cetera, so how are you, that's working  
3 with another agency, I understand that, Finance, but  
4 how are you dealing with SCRIE? There's so many  
5 people who are not signed up, we know that, but even  
6 those who are signed up, we spend hours every week,  
7 you know, lines out the door with people who don't  
8 have the right SCRIE information. They don't want to  
9 lose it, they want to get on it, they don't remember,  
10 et cetera.

11 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, thank  
12 you for that. And we welcome the partnership with you  
13 so that we can also advocate for what's needed there.  
14 At those older adult centers, we do have staff that  
15 work with the older adults to complete their  
16 applications. So, they do have some resources, and of  
17 course we want to do additional outreach so that they  
18 are aware that they have those services available to  
19 them.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I mean, it's one  
21 of those things that I think the Mayor and others  
should be doing it because a lot of those folks don't  
go to senior centers, or their older adult, whatever  
the hell they're called, but it's something that just  
needs a lot of attention. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

3 And actually, our office did the research  
4 about SCRIE and DRIE. People qualified, only 42  
5 percent of people applied because I see a lot of  
6 advocates nod their head. Yes, it is, the truth is,  
7 because people don't know the program, later on they  
8 lost their apartments, they lost their homes. This is  
9 definitely a joint partnership between all the City  
10 agencies. We need advocate, even my office, we help  
11 people to apply also. We need to have a campaign  
12 between City agency and between all the Council  
13 Members, even with Mayor, we should let people know  
14 this program exists. Apply before you lose your home.

15 And the next one, we have Council member  
16 Aldebol.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Good afternoon,  
18 and congratulations, and welcome to DFTA.

19 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: And the City  
21 Council budget hearing.

So, I have a few questions, actually. So,  
you know, federal funding is declining due to the  
removal of the pandemic era funding. How are you

2 planning to close that gap and prevent service  
3 reductions?

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, the  
5 fiscal cliff. So last year, New York City covered all  
6 federal funding that went away. Currently, it's all  
7 baseline funding right now. So, there are no specific  
8 fiscal cliffs regarding federal funding.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Okay. And home  
10 delivered meals appears to have declined by 25  
11 percent compared to the same period last year, what  
12 factors are contributing to that decline and what  
13 steps is DFTA taking to ensure that seniors are, that  
14 need meals are receiving meals? And on, you know, on  
15 Council Member Zhuang's point, what is the outreach  
16 and, you know, marketing and education to, you know,  
17 seniors about the services that are provided for  
18 these communities? We have throughout the city and in  
19 the Bronx, we have a lot of food deserts. And is, you  
20 know, DFTA doing anything to service those food  
21 desert areas? Have you identified areas that are in  
greater need? So those are my questions for now. I  
have a few more, but.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Okay. Well,  
thank you so much for your questions, and obviously

2 we all are very concerned about the federal  
3 environment now and some of the changes, and we're  
4 monitoring what may be the impact on New York City  
5 Aging. I do want to get back to you. This is one time  
6 that I'm going to have to say that I'm going to lean  
7 in a little bit on my nine days, and I'm going to  
8 say, I would like to take a deeper dive into some of  
9 these reductions. Obviously, we know we've spent more  
10 in the budget, and I don't know if you want to  
11 mention that, but if there's an area that we need to  
12 take a deeper dive, I'd like us to do that.

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, as  
12 you can see, for example, I mean, HDM has been  
13 growing every year and as a result of support from  
14 the Council.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Can you speak  
15 into the mic?

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Sorry.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Yeah, because we  
17 can't hear you.

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Can you  
19 hear me now?

20 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: No, you're  
21 off.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: No.

3 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: You hear  
4 me now? Sorry. It's like Teams, right?

5 Anyway, so as you know, for example,  
6 historically HDM has been increasing as well as the  
7 Council has been supporting the rate increases over  
8 time so the budget has grown so you know that. I  
9 mean, regarding the actual, like you said, the  
10 commission will get back to you regarding the  
11 reduction in the actual meals. I think there's  
12 probably a data issue there, but we'll get back to  
13 you on that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Okay. Can I ask  
15 another question?

16 So, on staffing, you have about a 13.9  
17 percent vacancy rate. How are you ensuring that  
18 there's adequate oversight of the over 1,400  
19 contracts with non-profits that you have across the  
20 city? And are there any issues with providers having  
21 funding delays because of?

22 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So,  
23 regarding on-time payments, we don't have any  
24 outstanding invoices to providers. So normally if  
25 invoices come in, we have a two-week turnaround. So,

2 regarding delayed payments, that's not one of our  
3 issues at all.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Okay.

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We do  
6 have, again, a robust, like I said, in terms of  
7 staffing, we have staff who are constantly contract  
8 managing the programs and so, if there are any  
9 issues, I mean, they normally get to one of us or,  
10 again.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Okay. And I do  
12 have a specific question about a center in my  
13 District, the Throgs Neck Senior Center. It's been  
14 closed for, I want to say, close to two years or  
15 less, but it's fallen in disrepair. It's under NYCHA,  
16 but it's now, I believe it's a Section Nine PACT  
17 building. And so that transition from NYCHA to PACT  
18 or even RAD, it feels like we're caught in limbo here  
19 as to who is responsible to make the repairs. So, the  
20 senior center, which is much needed, about 58 percent  
21 of the tenants in NYCHA housing in my District are  
over the age of 65.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes. Which  
is significant. And I'd say to you, we are aware that  
there are some centers or OACs that are in NYCHA

2 facilities that the building itself has  
3 infrastructure issues, and that is one of them, where  
4 there are issues there with the HVAC, heating,  
5 ventilation, and air conditioning, and the roof,  
6 aside from the site that we operate there. So again,  
7 this is another area where we need to partner with  
8 NYCHA and to see what can be done. And it might call  
9 for us to take another look, and perhaps if there's  
10 some swing space or something else that we can find  
11 in the neighborhood, we may have to take a look at it  
12 and make a hard decision because our overarching goal  
13 is that we are going to have safe, functional  
14 environments for every one of our centers. We know  
15 it's going to take time, but we will work tirelessly  
16 to get there because as I feel, and as I've shared  
17 with the team at DFTA, if I don't feel like I can  
18 send my grandmother there, my mother can't go there,  
19 and I don't want to be there, then I don't want to  
20 have anyone else in that environment as well. So, we  
21 will work towards making sure every one of those  
centers is a place we feel proud of.

COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Yeah. Currently  
they're using the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, but  
during the summer they can't use it because it's like

2 full-time summer, the kids are there for like day  
3 camp. And so now during the summer they won't have a  
4 space, they won't have a place to go to, and they've  
5 talked about transporting, does DFTA pay for the  
6 agency that's running that center to transport people  
7 to other centers, and how would that work? I know a  
8 lot of seniors, they like being in their community  
9 and don't like the idea of being transported  
10 someplace else, and I would say that a lot of the  
11 senior centers are full to capacity, so just kind of  
12 adding more people won't necessarily work, so we have  
13 to figure that one out sooner rather than later.

14 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: We do, and  
15 we know that it may take more innovative approaches  
16 for us to be able to serve our older adults, but I'll  
17 tell you, I agree that they should not be bussed into  
18 other communities. Their preference is to stay within  
19 their own communities and to have a home base  
20 somewhere close to where they actually live, where  
21 you can build those connections and that sense of  
22 belonging in a certain community. So yes, we do need  
23 to find other approaches and other methods. I haven't  
24 found them in nine days, but we will work towards  
25 coming back to you with some ideas that make sense,

2 and again, welcome your advocacy, and of course,  
3 community leaders and elected officials too, to help  
4 us to better serve those that deserve to age  
5 gracefully in place.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: And have you  
7 thought about working with other agencies or  
8 organizations like public libraries and even DOE  
9 schools to provide a space where our seniors can go  
10 and also interact with some young folks who can learn  
11 from us because I consider myself one of the few  
12 seniors on this Committee but, yeah.

13 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, think  
14 of it as we're paying it forward. We're getting it  
15 ready for the folks that will come after us. So, any  
16 steps that we take now will set the foundation for  
17 great work in the future.

18 But yes, we have looked at some of those  
19 areas. We've talked about being able to access space  
20 where we can have additional programming for our  
21 older adults in larger spaces, air-conditioned  
spaces. We know the cooling season, as much as we'd  
love it to be today, it will be here pretty soon, and  
so we're looking at that in connection with the  
cooling centers that we need to offer for our older

2 adults in the summertime. So, we're looking at a lot  
3 of different approaches. Again, once we start to  
4 solidify some of these a bit more, I think that's a  
5 better time for us to have a real logical, cogent  
6 discussion about what we can do.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. If you  
9 don't tell anyone, people think you are 25.

10 And we just joined by Council Member  
11 Dinowitz and the next one, Finance Chair Lee.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, everyone.

13 Welcome, Commissioner. And it's always good to see  
14 Jose, who's been helpful. And it's great to, well,  
15 scary a little bit to be in this new role, but as  
16 some folks at DFTA know, it's great to see the staff  
17 as well and, of course, the advocates. Having run a  
18 social service non-profit with two senior centers and  
19 a Meals on Wheels program for 12 years, I fully  
20 appreciate the work that DFTA has done in supporting  
21 our communities.

One comment I will make though, is that I  
think that part of the reason why the budget's  
increasing, even though the number of seniors have  
not necessarily for homebound-delivered meals is

2 because of the fact that the costs have been  
3 increasing and we've been trying to catch up with the  
4 national levels of rates for HDM so I think that's  
5 part of it. Because I think back when I was, this was  
6 in 2014 or 2015, as a subcontractor, we were only  
7 getting reimbursed \$5.25 per meal, which was, even at  
8 that time, extremely, extremely low. And so I just  
9 wanted to actually check on the fact that the subs  
10 are also getting their indirect rates and fair share  
11 of the contracts as well as the main, not to say that  
12 we want to take away from the main contractors,  
13 because obviously we don't, but how do we increase  
14 that pie? And so if you don't have it today, because  
15 I get you're on day nine, but if you don't have it  
16 today, I'd love to see updated numbers in terms of  
17 where the reimbursement rates are with the mains  
18 versus the subs, if you can provide that. And then  
19 also, I know that I'm very well, one of the things I  
20 hate are unfunded mandates, because that cost should  
21 not have to fall onto the providers, and so when we  
did our seven-day meal delivery service for seventh  
day, the bill that we passed, I specifically wanted  
to make sure there was language in the bill that was  
subject to appropriation. And so just in your

2 conversations with OMB and with the Mayor's Office,  
3 does it look like there will be, and I know that  
4 we're doing the budget dance right now, but I would  
5 gladly advocate for you guys to obviously get funding  
6 in the budget for the seventh day meal, because as we  
7 know, a lot of the seniors, the homebound meals, it's  
8 usually only just the one meal a day that they get.  
9 So, I just wanted to check in on that as well in  
10 terms of how those conversations are going with the  
11 Administration.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I'm  
13 going to go back to the very first question. So  
14 currently, as we all know, it's \$14.78 per meal.

15 So now, unfortunately, we don't get  
16 involved with the conversations regarding  
17 subcontractors and what they negotiate with the  
18 prime.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: But do you guys have  
20 a sense of what those numbers are?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, it  
varies from provider to provider. It's not consistent  
across the board.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Like what's the floor  
and what's the range?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So,  
3 we'll give you that information. I don't want to kind  
4 of give a guess right now, but we'll provide that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And I'd say  
7 on the other issue, obviously a lot more conversation  
8 needs to happen surrounding that. I have some  
9 preliminary numbers of the cost, and I'm not so sure  
10 the bill addresses the funding vehicle for this, so.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah. It was  
12 basically on the Administration to see if we can put  
13 money into the budget for that, yeah.

14 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Okay. So, a  
15 lot more conversation. I'd really love to have those  
16 conversations over the next few weeks or so. And it's  
17 something that we can discuss, because looking at the  
18 preliminary numbers, we're talking about an  
19 astronomical number that would need to be, it would  
20 be a pretty heavy financial lift.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: It's about 300  
million, right?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: From what I remember?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Because I  
3 haven't looked at the number, but I remember 300  
4 million is sticking out, okay.

5 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: So, further  
6 exploration and discussion, and definitely something  
7 for a future meeting.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Yes. And I will  
9 advocate that for future need as well.

10 So really quickly shifting gears, because  
11 I'm putting on my hat of my former Committee Chair  
12 role as Mental Health Chair. Obviously, the senior  
13 mental health is super, super important, and just  
14 wanted to know, I think some of the advocates are  
15 expressing concerns, or health providers also, about  
16 the contracts. And so if you could differentiate the  
17 contracts that you may have that support mental  
18 health programs within New York City Aging, and then  
19 with Geriatric Mental Health, I know there are groups  
20 like SPOP and others who are very unique in the sense  
21 that they serve, they have both the Article 31, as  
well as the DFTA contract. And so I remember there  
was, I don't know if this has been fixed yet, I'm  
sure you guys can answer. Like even when I was at  
KCS, we have an Article 31, as well as DFTA

2 contracts, and so the question I would always ask is,  
3 why are the two contractors separate, especially when  
4 we're serving linguistically sensitive populations?

5 And if you could speak to when the contracts are  
6 going to get renewed, or when there are new RFPs  
7 coming out, and if those changes could be looked at.

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I'm  
9 going to talk about the renewals. So currently, we  
10 have about 173 contracts which will be renewed.  
11 Roughly, it's transportation, OECs, NORCs, and so  
12 forth. So, we are renewing contracts that will end in  
13 2027 so we'll get back to you with a nuance  
14 regarding, again, between the direct mental health  
15 contracts and the Article 10, you said? Sorry, what  
16 was the Article?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: It's Article 31,  
18 which are the outpatient mental health.

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
20 So, we'll get back to you on that nuance.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yeah. Because I just  
want to emphasize that I think that if there's value  
in a non-profit that has the DFTA contracts, and if  
they have the Article 31, I would just really

2 advocate that they should be allowed to provide those  
3 services within one organization.

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
5 There's a lot of nuance, and like I said, we'll get  
6 back to you on that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Thank you. Thanks,  
8 Chair, and congrats, Chair.

9 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

10 Next, we have Council Member Hudson,  
11 former Aging Chair.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much,  
13 and happy to be here as a Committee Member, although  
14 obviously very sad to no longer be the Chair,  
15 although grateful for my new chairmanship or  
16 chairpersonship, and welcome, as everyone has said.  
17 Commissioner, I look forward to spending some time  
18 and getting to know each other.

19 I've introduced legislation to permit  
20 older adult centers to opt to provide grab-and-go  
21 meals to their clients, as many older adults prefer  
not to eat in congregate settings due to health  
concerns following the COVID-19 pandemic. What is the  
Department's current position on grab-and-go meals,

2 and whether they're permitted in OAC contracts, and  
3 are there any limitations given State guidelines?

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, thank  
5 you for the warm welcome, and I'm looking forward to  
6 working with all of you to continue the great  
7 advocacy and the work that we do for our older  
8 adults.

9 Grab-and-go meals, definitely we are in  
10 support. Any avenue or vehicle that we can use to  
11 provide meals for our older adults, get it into their  
12 hands in the way that they prefer, we are in support  
13 of. I know that there are some changes that we do  
14 need to take a look at, because I'm aware that  
15 there's an additional cost, and pretty much it's the  
16 cost per container that some folks are worried about.  
17 So again, I'd say, as we did on the earlier topic, I  
18 would like to have additional discussion,  
19 conversation. It is something that I would like to  
20 join you in advocating for, but we do need to have  
21 more discussion.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Happy to  
have that discussion, and also want to just say that  
I fully support adding 300 million dollars to the

2 budget to feed older adults seven days a week. Just  
3 want to get that on the record.

4           There's a proliferation of private,  
5 for-profit social adult daycare centers that are, in  
6 many cases, busing older adults from across the city  
7 and pulling attendants from City-operated older adult  
8 centers, not to mention they're charging Medicaid  
9 daily for things like measuring blood pressure. Is  
10 this on NYC Aging's radar, and if so, what is your  
11 position on them, and are you working to get folks  
12 out of those centers and into ours?

13           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, it is  
14 on our radar. It's a topic that's very concerning to  
15 us, but we have better control, obviously, over the  
16 centers that are under our purview. So we'd like to  
17 have some discussions with some of these newer  
18 centers that are popping up around the city, but we  
19 also need to have that pipeline to our older adults  
20 and really explaining to them the services that we do  
21 have available at the centers that we have within the  
City that would probably benefit them a lot more in  
the long run, and especially the issue that we talked  
about earlier with remaining in your own community,  
having that connection, having that sense of

2 belonging, being able to share with people that you  
3 will more than likely see every day or that could be  
4 alerted, let's say if the senior has an issue,  
5 persons that are right within their own community  
6 will recognize, oh, you know, I didn't see them  
7 today. So, we want to continue that type of  
8 surrounding, that type of environment, the feel and  
9 experience of the New York City centers. So, yes,  
again, another area that needs to be explored more,  
but it's definitely on our radar.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. And  
11 currently older adults make up 20 percent of New York  
12 City's population, and by 2040, that percentage will  
13 increase to 40 percent. Given the rapidly increasing  
14 older adult population, are there any plans to expand  
15 funding for NORCs on the Administration side? The  
16 current funding of 16.3 million dollars seems wholly  
17 inadequate, given that our city will have more older  
18 adults than children under 18 by 2030. Essentially,  
19 many large residential buildings across the city will  
very soon be naturally occurring retirement  
communities.

20 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, we  
21 welcome the aging to remain in New York City so, we

2 know at some point, especially with folks living  
3 longer and hopefully folks continuing to want to stay  
4 in New York City, the numbers will rise substantially  
5 over the next few years, and it's a very big tent, we  
6 know that. So, yes, we will have additional  
7 conversations with the Administration regarding the  
8 needs at that time or preparing now for the needs  
9 proactively so that we're not hit with a crisis in  
10 2030. But yes, it is something that we have already  
11 started discussing at DFTA, and we'll continue  
12 preparing and working along with all of you so that  
13 we can prevent any crisis in 2030.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

15 And last year, you embarked on an  
16 800,000-dollar anti-ageism ad campaign, which  
17 included subway ads informing New Yorkers about  
18 ageism and how to spot it. Can you explain the  
19 decision behind prioritizing anti-ageism advocacy,  
20 and do you have any metrics to measure the campaign's  
21 success?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, I  
don't think we have the metrics with us today, and we  
will bring you some additional information on  
anti-ageism, and as I did mention, we will be

2 revising somewhat the sole focus on ageism because we  
3 do believe that our older adults have many more  
4 substantial issues they're dealing with today. As I  
5 mentioned earlier, the meat and potatoes issues of  
6 making sure that there's food on the table, that  
7 they're in safe environments, they have an affordable  
8 place to live so, there may be some modifications to  
9 the campaign, but we will bring you the metrics on  
10 the ageism platform.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Great. Thank you.

12 And I know that you are aware that you  
13 have one of the smallest City agency budgets in New  
14 York City and in City government, and it shouldn't be  
15 that way with the growing older adult population and  
16 the older adult population that already exists and  
17 the importance of people aging in place. I want to  
18 state for the record how much I will always continue  
19 to advocate for more funding for your agency and hope  
20 that, well, I know you will be a partner in that, but  
21 I hope that the Administration is able to increase  
the budget significantly to reflect the importance of  
the older adult population here in New York City.  
Thank you, and thank you, Chair.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. And I want  
3 to follow up to clarify the cost for legislation that  
4 could provide home delivery meals seven days a week  
5 for bill Intro. 280. You said 300 million, but  
6 previously we heard 27 million.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
8 That's correct, 27.7 million dollars. That's the cost  
9 to bring seven meals for HDM.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: 27 million, not  
11 three.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 27.7,  
13 yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay. 27 million.

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay. Thanks.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: It should be even  
18 easier to secure then.

19 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Yeah.

20 And then we have Co-Chair Mealy.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair  
Zhuang. Thank you, and congratulations.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Thank you so  
much. I have so many, but I know sooner or later you

2 and I will be speaking, and I have such a passion for  
3 my seniors. They call me the guru.

4 So, what percentage of you think your  
5 budget will be handling the centers with AC for the  
6 summer, cooling centers because we have to prepare  
7 before. Last year, I feel it was almost a failure. I  
8 couldn't find real cooling centers for our seniors.  
9 This is between life and death. So, could you give me  
10 that percentage really quick, because I have some  
11 other questions.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, it's  
13 actually not a percentage. So, we've been basically,  
14 to your point, we've been looking at since last year,  
15 looking at all the different sites that need to  
16 basically be repaired, and authorizing those going  
17 forward. So, we can give you a list of those centers  
18 where the HVACs are being worked on and so forth.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Any of them?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Well,  
21 again, it's based on health and safety, depending on  
which ones are needed to be repaired so, we've been  
starting that process last year, and we're actually  
now doing the process with the providers and  
notifying them about the cooling centers and then

2 determining which ones also need to be fixed really  
3 quickly so that's kind of our focus right now.

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And I just  
5 want to add on to that just a little bit. Our centers  
6 do have AC, and there's a report that comes out every  
7 September that mentions the AC status at every one of  
8 our sites. But of course, you are aware of my  
9 background and the fact that emergency preparedness  
10 has always been extremely important to me, and now  
11 that I get the chance to focus my emergency  
12 management skills on our older adults, there is no  
13 more important issue during the summertime than AC.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I will be your  
15 partner.

16 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: So, you can  
17 expect that.

18 I just wanted to mention, though, because  
19 I didn't get a chance to say, and on everything that  
20 we do, we definitely want to meet the needs of all of  
21 our older adults, and our goal is to ensure every New  
Yorker can age in place in New York City. We welcome  
the partnership with the Council. We will continue to  
work with anyone that wants to work with us, because  
as I mentioned earlier, we do have a big tent. It's

2 going to call for all of us to advocate and to work  
3 really tirelessly to be able to provide all that we  
4 need for our older adults, but we want them to have  
5 everything they deserve.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. And I'm  
7 looking forward to that.

8 Last budget cycle, we were told that an  
9 RFP would be released around the end of Calendar Year  
10 2025, with new contracts set to start at the  
11 beginning of Fiscal '27. To date, the RFP have not  
12 been released, and it's unclear when it will be. Will  
13 you know when a RFP will be released? Just for full  
14 knowledge, I'm one that came in office and our senior  
15 center was closed. I can give you the percentage of  
16 how many people we lost because that center. Food,  
17 (INAUDIBLE) room, exercise room, arts and craft room,  
18 big dining room, closed. When I came in, I made it a  
19 mandate. Now it's coming out of my own budget,  
20 because I know that's a life and death situation.  
21 I've been asking now, when will a RFP that could get  
off my budget and get onto yours to make sure that we  
all doing our fair share? So, would you know when  
that RFP or a RFP will be released and when a new  
contract is expected to begin, and the capacity is

2 being new now. Have you budgeted that in? How much  
3 more the contracts will cost?

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So,  
5 currently the proposed RFP will be probably sometime  
6 in the fall of '27.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: '27? I got it.  
8 Okay.

9 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So,  
10 that's probably sometime November, December with a  
11 start date of July of 2027.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: July?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Of 2027.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. Will  
15 additional capacity be included in the RFP to fund  
16 centers in part of the city with high older adult  
17 populations that may not currently have adequate New  
18 York City funding like myself and OACs? Will  
19 additional capacity be included for the new expansion  
20 of programs at OACs? And please put in detail since  
21 I'm the one doing it. I have boots on the ground. I  
have seniors doing boots on the ground, teaching them  
sign language. We have campfires and movie nights. We  
had just speed friendshipping with our seniors. This  
has been a center, went from 15 people coming to now

2 45 because I'm making sure those programs are in. So,  
3 how can we really partner to make sure every senior  
4 center has that? I moved to (INAUDIBLE) right now,  
5 but what other capacities can we partner in to make  
6 sure that our seniors have fun and feel they are  
7 welcome at every senior center? When I take my show  
8 on the road, y'all better watch out because I'm  
9 coming with my boots on the ground.

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So,  
9 currently, for example, we have a specific budget,  
10 and I'm going to sit for that RFP. It doesn't include  
11 expansion, however. Again, however, the Commissioner  
12 is nine days in. She'll be evaluating the RFP and the  
13 proposal, again, so this is an opportunity for the  
14 Commissioner to evaluate how we operate and how we  
15 basically run these RFPs. So, again, right now there  
16 is no expansion, but the Commissioner is nine days  
17 in. She's going to be revaluing all the RFPs that are  
18 going to come out. So, that's kind of right now where  
19 we're at.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: And I'm chair of  
19 the senior centers and seniors food insecurity. So,  
20 this budget, I'm going to every center to see, to  
21

2 make sure that all of them are up to capacity and  
3 getting the food that they really need.

4 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Let me  
5 congratulate you for the boots on the ground, for the  
6 spirit, for all of that. You know, one of the joys, I  
7 would say, of being the Commissioner is that you can  
8 look at how our older adults are viewed in the city,  
9 and one of the very first comments I made about our  
10 older adults is that not everyone is frail and  
11 elderly. You know, there's a huge number of us that  
12 want to have fun, and we recognize that we're in the  
13 Big Apple and we want our bite too. So, we have very  
14 similar views when it comes to how our older adults  
15 should be treated and some of the services that we  
16 should offer for them and entertainment and all those  
17 things that make life worth living in New York City.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. And  
19 Chair know (INAUDIBLE). Whereas, if the City is  
20 funding these programs, why are the seniors have to  
21 pay out of their own pockets? I would love to have a  
conversation about that because something is wrong  
with that picture. I just found out one senior  
center, I gave extra money, and now they have to pay  
125 dollars to go on a trip. I feel our seniors have

2 paved their way, blood, sweat, and tears, built this  
3 city, and now in their retirement, they still have to  
4 pay when things should be free. So, Chair, I'm  
5 looking forward to, and Commissioner, we're going to  
6 get down to the bottom. I don't mind them paying a  
7 little, maybe. I really don't want them to pay  
8 anything, but I think 125 dollars is egregious. So,  
9 not talking about the food, they have to pay two or  
10 five dollars just to have breakfast or lunch. Some  
11 people don't eat because they don't have the dollar,  
12 two, or five. That's just a statement. Thank you,  
13 Chair, for indulging me. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Can I,  
16 just really quickly. So, again, it's a contribution.  
17 They don't have to actually pay for the meals. Again,  
18 they're not required to pay for the meals.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: They don't know  
20 that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Do the directors  
know that --

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: -- where they  
can't.

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes.  
3 It's posted. It should be posted. It's a  
4 contribution. They don't have to pay anything.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's my job now to  
6 make sure it's posted because a lot of people don't  
7 eat because they don't see that sign, and they don't  
8 want to feel embarrassed being turned away to eat if  
9 they don't have a dollar or five dollars just for  
10 lunch. So, I'm looking forward to partnering with you  
11 on that to make sure every senior knows it's not  
12 embarrassing to not have the money to eat because  
13 they have paid their way already. Thank you so much,  
14 Chair.

15 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: You're so  
16 welcome. And I'll say, just really quickly, it is our  
17 goal that every older adult eat, and we certainly  
18 don't want anyone embarrassed seeking a meal. So,  
19 maybe if there's some proactive approach letting our  
20 older adults know of the fact that they don't need to  
21 pay for these meals, I think we can do more in that  
respect.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

Follow-up with the meal questions. I  
share my personal story last time my grandma enjoyed

2 those congregate meals. She loved it, and she  
3 sometimes couldn't finish, she'd bring home for  
4 dinner. And also, is New York City Aging plan to  
5 increase funding for OAC provider to address growing  
6 food cost, increasing client demands, and the high  
7 cost of the food?

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I  
9 don't know if you know, but we actually monitor the  
10 budget very closely, and we basically ensure that  
11 providers who actually need additional funding, so  
12 for example, there's always going to be underspending  
13 in some of these contracts, and what we do is every  
14 quarter we look to see exactly where the  
15 underspending is and move money appropriately to  
16 ensure that providers can cover their costs, whether  
17 it's food costs, utilities, and things of that  
18 nature.

19 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And  
20 inflation is certainly a part of that discussion,  
21 because we're not immune, we're just as subject as  
22 everyone else, so we want to be sure that we are  
23 offering rates that make sense.

24 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also, some  
25 providers, some area need kosher, and I see COPO is

2 here, they need the halal food, also culturally  
3 sensitive meals, do you know which, how the provider  
4 contracts those, give out the contract, what's the  
5 percentage of minority contractors, and how they  
6 designate to pick the contractors?

6 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: So, thank  
7 you, instead of addressing it as a percentage, what  
8 we're doing is that every one of those centers, every  
9 one of our OACs, it's part of their contract that  
10 they must know their community, they must provide  
11 culturally aligned meals, and if that calls for a  
12 specialized meal, a kosher, a halal, then it must be  
13 offered at that center. I think now we know that  
14 we're in one of the most diverse cities in the world,  
15 so we are very, very cognizant of the fact that we  
16 need to meet the cultural community needs of each one  
17 of our constituent areas. So, I'd say, just overall,  
18 we're doing well, but if you need to have specifics,  
19 we can bring that back as well.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: A lot of time we see,  
18 very often, we don't, the small business owner, if  
19 they are people of color, they don't get the  
20 contract. And also, do you guys make sure this kind  
21 of issue will address with DFTA contract?

2           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes, we do,  
3 and I'd have to say, we differ on that opinion that a  
4 person of color would not get the contract, because  
5 it is a very competitive process. We don't control  
6 the process, but the bidders will decide if they want  
7 to bid on a particular contract or not. We have an  
8 equitable process for selection of the vendor, and  
9 sometimes you may have some displacement. We may have  
10 a vendor that's been offering a service for a very  
11 long time, but through the competitive process, you  
12 may have someone that is a better choice for that  
13 particular time. So, from our standpoint, it is a  
14 competitive process. There's no color assigned to the  
15 contract, so it will go to whoever is the best  
16 vendor.

17           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay. Got it.

18           But I'd like to see the numbers by race,  
19 by, if it's a minority-owned business, as a city, as  
20 New York City, as such big cities support minority  
21 business, we'd like to see they provide our senior  
support also.

          COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Absolutely.

          CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also for the  
budget for OACs. Over 300 OACs currently fund through

2 DFTA. A lot of time, DFTA continue have the smallest  
3 capital plan of all our City agencies. How do we, as  
4 we enter the budget cycle for Fiscal 2027, what  
5 additional resources our DFTA can advocate to help  
6 the OACs to improve their capital projects?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, as  
7 the Commissioner mentioned earlier, we have a capital  
8 budget, but we actually don't manage the capital  
9 budget. So, for us, for example, what we've been  
10 looking at is more about the expense budget, and  
11 actually looking at health and safety issues, and  
12 that would be where we can then basically actually  
13 provide the funding for the provider so they can  
14 actually do all the work. So, that is actually much  
15 easier for us than actually having a capital process,  
16 because a lot of the capital budget is managed by  
17 DDC, and it's their bandwidth to actually renovate  
18 all these different sites. So, that's kind of what  
19 we're looking for more.

17 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And I would  
18 say also that we are monitoring outcomes. So, I know  
19 that in 2025, we completed 27 projects, and we're  
20 still looking at the list of priority projects for  
21 2026, but the goal always is to make sure that we're

2 in safe, functional space. So, if there are any  
3 issues or any sites that need to be prioritized  
4 because of the fact that they're not meeting that  
5 very simple, basic goal, we will be happy to add them  
6 to the list of the projects that need to be  
7 prioritized.

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, we  
9 also would like to thank the Council for providing us  
10 with 5 million dollars for health and safety of 55  
11 projects, some major renovations, kitchens, roofs,  
12 and things of that nature. So, we would like, again,  
13 we would like to continue if that would be something  
14 that could be done for '27. Again, that is the  
15 quickest route to get the money to the providers to  
16 renovate a lot of these sites with respect to the  
17 nature sites. But yes, again, thank you very much for  
18 that.

19 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: When you talk about  
20 the New York City Council budget, we do have a  
21 question. Council Members allocate NYC Council  
discretionary funding to supplement in-district work  
for variety of populations, including older adult  
centers services and the NORCs. It's separate from  
agency contract, and they are deliverable. We have

2 heard from providers. In the last few years, NYC  
3 Aging has required provider receive discretionary  
4 funding to hit a very special program outcome related  
5 to intent of Council discretionary contracting in  
6 order to receive discretionary funding. Commissioner,  
7 can you explain New York City Aging intent and  
8 expectation behind this policy, and why NYC Aging  
9 require this additional expectation to unlock Council  
10 funding, and has Council been consulting rollout of  
11 this policy?

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, what  
13 we expect is everyone to provide. Give us, for  
14 example, there's a budget.

15 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Yeah. Let's say we  
16 give a discretionary to a non-profit, and a  
17 non-profit give us what they want to do. They have  
18 already have the discretionary description of that  
19 funding, and then DFTA coming to say how you needed  
20 to do another thing, one, two, three. A lot of time,  
21 and then if they don't do it, they don't get funding,  
as a lot of provider told us.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I  
would like to get examples of that, because right  
now, the business process, the way we do is, for

2 example, is when you do an allocation, there's  
3 basically the purpose of funds. There's a budget that  
4 we request from you guys, from the provider, and they  
5 provide units. That's a simple process, nothing  
6 difficult. Like I say, if you're basically, if you  
7 can give us examples, because we do cost.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Chair, can I give  
9 an example.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. Like I just  
12 gave 250,000 to my senior center. It was for  
13 educational boat ride, a pool table, exercise  
14 equipment, and now, it's like the provider I gave it  
15 to, it's either they could do it or not so, how are  
16 you watching that? We gave our discretionary money,  
17 and now, I gave it, they don't have to do it. So, how  
18 are we watching that? Is that kind of?

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.  
20 So, there is a business process.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: She said that's not  
what she's talking about.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right,  
so I'm trying to figure out, if you can give us  
examples, that's an example I need to know.

2           So, right now, for example, in your case,  
3 I would say, so in your case, for example, that's  
4 money that is given to Fort Greene, correct, just  
5 kind of specific. So, we actually ask for a budget,  
6 right? You got a certain allocation, we want to know  
7 a budget, so we can then track it against the  
8 spending, right? You would want to know exactly what  
9 was spent or not, right? That's how we track it. We  
10 know exactly what the line item is, how much it  
11 costs. Again, like I said, we don't stop anyone from  
12 getting a discretionary award.

13           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: If the senior  
14 center that you, or someone who gave the money, do  
15 not do those allocations to what it's supposed to be,  
16 what is the recourse?

17           CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.  
18 So, I would say, for example, we can have a separate  
19 conversation to go through the process, so you guys  
20 feel comfortable in this whole thing. But again,  
21 there is a business process. We do not stop anyone  
from receiving discretionary funds. That is funding  
that you guys give to the providers, so we don't stop  
any of that. It's kind of, like I said, we should  
have a separate conversation to give us examples so

2 we can review it, like I said, I mentioned earlier,  
3 because it's kind of hard for me to believe this,  
4 because we really track this every month. We have  
5 metrics and seeing exactly what the spending is,  
6 exactly how many people are invoicing. Matter of  
7 fact, we actually go to discretionaries to find  
8 discretionary providers to ensure that they actually  
9 get the money when they're due for them. So, we are  
10 constantly trying to make sure they submit invoices  
11 on time. So, I'm a little taken back by that, but  
12 again, we would love to have a conversation to see  
13 exactly examples of this.

14 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Yes. And I'd  
15 love to really connect with anyone that has an  
16 example like this, because definitely, DFTA does not  
17 want to be a barrier to any one of our sites moving  
18 forward on any of their projects. If there's a  
19 specific issue or a challenge, we should be able to  
20 work together to be able to overcome those hurdles so  
21 that our centers and our sites and our older adults  
have what we want them to have, and particularly if  
there's money already on the table.

2 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And the other  
3 question I have is not related to senior center DFTA  
4 fund.

5 A lot of time, there's a senior group in  
6 the basement of the church. Some Council Member give  
7 5,000 dollars to them to buy coffee every day. Some  
8 people meet twice a week. Some group meet three times  
9 a week. Some close in the summer because the youth  
10 need to use the space. So, this type of organization  
11 has very hard time to get their 5,000 dollars every  
12 year, and they come to our office all the time, and  
13 we be told it's a conflict of interest, we cannot  
14 help them, but in some people's private time, they  
15 try to help. Is there any way we can make that  
16 process easier and smoother?

17 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, I  
18 welcome your advocacy on this. Maybe there is a way  
19 that we can join forces. Again, nine days in, I can't  
20 say there definitely is, but why shouldn't we explore  
21 it? Let's look at it together with some of our  
non-profit partners in the community. Maybe there is  
a way that we can work to better keep folks in those  
churches or other areas where they feel comfortable  
and where they feel connected. We don't want to break

2 that connection ever. We want to do all that we can  
3 to support them, so let's find a way.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: I have a non-profit.  
5 They haven't get money from 2023. The other Council  
6 Member before me give them 5,000 dollars, and then  
7 when I go there to visit, they said, Susan, don't  
8 give us money. We cannot get it. It's fake. This is  
9 what they said to me. It's fake. So, it's very  
10 disappointing how hard for those small groups, it's  
11 not small, they have 200 people meet once or twice a  
12 week. It's not that small. If those people don't come  
13 out to meet, probably they're going to stay home all  
14 week. A lot of people in wheelchair. It is very sad.  
15 Only 5,000 dollars, they couldn't get it. I love to  
16 work with you about this issue. This is not just my  
17 District have this issue. A lot of Council Member  
18 have similar issue.

19 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, let's  
20 do a deep dive.

21 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Yes.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And let's  
find out where the barriers exist, and then let's get  
them out of the way.

2 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Yeah. I have some  
3 question about housing. We all know, we did a survey  
4 between Council Members. Most of Council Members  
5 said, 74 percent Council Members said they have issue  
6 about senior housing. Far many adults are able to  
7 afford the rent increase, and then they get kicked  
8 out from their building or some environment they  
9 don't have leveled sidewalk or walkway. And our older  
10 adults make almost 20 percent our city's population.  
11 Does NYC Aging keep track of how many building units  
12 our City plan to do, and which one is suitable for  
13 our senior residents?

14 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: In  
15 partnership with HPD, we would like to work with them  
16 on taking a look at that issue specifically, because  
17 we know that there are some monies available for  
18 minor repairs and things like that, that should help  
19 some of these older adults to be able to stay in  
20 their homes with minimal modifications that would  
21 make it a more safe environment. So yes, that is an  
issue I think we should explore more deeply because  
if we can keep our older adults in their homes that  
they love and they prefer, in the communities that

2 they love and they prefer, that would be part of our  
3 mission at DFTA.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also I heard from  
5 some non-profit developer says the SARA program for  
6 seniors is very, very slow and very, very hard to get  
7 it. Is DFTA able to help us to advocate for this  
8 issue? Because even they want to build senior  
9 housing, first it's not profitable, and the process  
10 is very slow. It's kind of discourage people, don't  
11 build. And also if the developer build the other,  
12 like say homeless shelter, they can make more money.  
13 So as any developer, they will definitely choose the  
14 other plan than for seniors. Is any way we can work  
15 together as a partnership to advocate for this issue?

16 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: As you know,  
17 I see senior housing, seniors and older adults need  
18 to be prioritized. When we talk about building  
19 affordable housing or any type of setting in New York  
20 City, if the goal is for older adults to remain in  
21 New York City, then we know they have to be in an  
affordable place. So yes, we would like to advocate  
along with you. We will work with HPD. We'll look at  
the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers where we have some  
interagency collaboration that perhaps may be able to

2 assist us in moving this forward. But I'd say we need  
3 to shake every tree and go down every road that we  
4 can in order for us to be able to ensure that our  
5 older adults do get some priority placements and that  
6 we do have in all of those contracts for these  
7 developers and builders, some priority for them so  
8 that they're looked at before everyone else. I know  
9 that may not sound fair to some, but for the older  
10 adults that have earned it, they deserve it.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I love to  
12 hear that.

13 And also, I do believe we need to have a  
14 plan with HPD and also NYCHA. They have a lot of  
15 apartments empty and they're not fixed. No one able  
16 to move in. I heard that large number there. We have  
17 the building already built. We only need to fix, let  
18 people to move in, have regular life, but we just  
19 don't, I don't understand what's a problem there,  
20 what's a gap there? Why not able to happen? I know  
21 it's not your issue, your Department, but --

22 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: No, it's  
23 not, but I was just going to make one comment. The  
24 Cabinet for Older New Yorkers includes organizations  
25 like NYCHA, so we can have them at the table. Perhaps

2 they can shed some light on the issue for us and they  
3 can certainly help us.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Maybe we should have  
5 a task force for seniors for housing issue.

6 And also, we have, my District in  
7 Bensonhurst has the highest number of SNAP theft.  
8 That's very bad for all the seniors. How NYC Aging  
9 work with the City agency to address this issue?  
10 Because most of people get scammed as seniors. And we  
11 have a line of people, the beginning of the month,  
12 every single month, and my office come up with a  
13 video, teach senior how to use that app, lock,  
14 unlock. It is very difficult. I have 30 seniors  
15 sitting in my office, Ada, my former Deputy  
16 Chief-of-Staff, give them training how to use it. But  
17 for senior, take them, first, they don't speak  
18 English at all. And they don't know how to use  
19 iPhone, high tech. And for them, they get older, the  
20 finger get bigger. It's very hard to lock, unlock.  
21 And then they forget the password. It's impossible  
for them to use. And then every single month, when  
they open their banks, and they don't have money  
there, because money coming 12 o'clock at night,  
12:15 in the morning, it's gone. And it's repeated.

2 We can see it's like some Brown's Grocery. The person  
3 living in Brooklyn have no idea where that grocery  
4 is. The money is gone. And it repeats. We try to have  
5 meeting with State, and they always say they're  
6 looking to it, and then nothing happens.

7           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well,  
8 there's a few ways that we can address this issue.  
9 And it is a huge issue. We know that there's two  
10 forms, really, of the theft that's occurring with  
11 SNAP. One is that the perpetrators are using the  
12 skimming devices so, they somehow extract the  
13 client's information from the skimming device. And  
14 then the second is just flat-out identity theft. So,  
15 in addition to partnering with NYPD, and we do  
16 partner with them on this issue, letting them know  
17 when we have received reports of this type of  
18 incident. I know that they're tracking, and they're  
19 specifically looking at the number of older adults  
20 that have been affected by this issue. But we're  
21 also, on the DFTA side, we have outreach to the older  
adults, and we're teaching them how to protect  
themselves from cyberattack. But as you mentioned,  
some of it may be technology issues also, and maybe  
there's additional training that can be offered in

2 multi-languages so that we can help older adults to  
3 be able to protect themselves so that they don't have  
4 this issue reoccurring every month.

5 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: I have a follow-up  
6 question about technology. A lot of time, the  
7 seniors, especially people in my neighborhood,  
8 English is their second language. A lot of people  
9 don't speak English at all. They don't know how to  
10 use this high-tech. Even they don't know how to use  
11 iPad, iPhone. They don't know how to use FaceTime.  
12 Different neighborhoods have different needs. This is  
13 my neighborhood, and I spoke to some senior  
14 organization. They are doing all the fancy artwork.  
15 But how do we address this issue? Can we have more  
16 training for high-tech?

17 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: It's not really  
19 high-tech. It's really basically training how to use  
20 iPad, iPhone, how to unlock, lock your SNAP benefits  
21 when you are not using. This type of training, can we  
advocate for more funding and more training in OACs,  
neighborhood organizations, and partner together with  
DFTA?

2           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Absolutely.  
3 I would never say no to additional training in this  
4 respect. But I will say, right now, we have 113 of  
5 our centers that offer a technology lab for our older  
6 adults so they can take advantage of that right now.  
7 And as you mentioned, very basic training, basic  
8 things about how to log on to an iPad, how to get  
9 into your banking statement, how to use these basic  
10 technologies so that you can improve your life every  
11 day and protect yourself from cyber threat. So, 113  
12 of those centers right now offer it. And of course,  
13 we should have it at all 308.

14           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also, how much  
15 funding is budgeted for NYC older adult technology  
16 program in Fiscal 2026 and in the outyears?

17           COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: If I don't  
18 have that number now, then we'll bring that number  
19 back for you on how much funding is actually  
20 allocated for that purpose.

21           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: You think it's going  
to get expanded?

          COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well,  
training, if you think about it, we talked about some  
budget neutral things that we can do as well. If we

2 already have trainers at some of these centers, maybe  
3 there's an opportunity to expand the training in the  
4 places that we already have it so there are things  
5 that we can do. As I mentioned earlier, we want to  
6 use innovative approaches, not just the old  
7 traditional models that maybe don't work for us  
8 anymore. So perhaps there is a way for us to expand  
9 training. There's also training that can be offered  
10 virtually. And once we start to teach our older  
11 adults how to use some of these platforms, that they  
12 may not even have to leave their homes to attend. So,  
13 let's look into other ways that we can address this  
14 problem that may not always call for additional  
15 dollars.

16 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

17 And also, we have more questions from  
18 Council Member Aldebol.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Hi. So, I do have  
20 a question about DFTA and Department of Homeless  
21 Services and our shelters. As you know, homelessness  
is impacting seniors at a higher rate than ever. The  
fastest growing population of homeless adults are  
seniors. And wanting to know how you can help provide  
services to those seniors, not just once they've

2 entered our shelter system, to get them out of the  
3 shelters and back into whether it's transitional  
4 housing or supportive housing.

5 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Absolutely.

6 And as noted previously, affordable housing and  
7 having a safe place to lay your head at night, that  
8 is one of our goals that speaks to our true mission  
9 at DFTA. So, it is an area that's on our radar, of  
10 course. And of course, with my background, I'm very  
11 well aware of how difficult it is to get older adults  
12 into an appropriate setting, and it does take a  
13 while. It does take some complex solutions for these  
14 problems, because not everybody fits into a  
15 particular bucket. Many of our older adults have  
16 different comorbidities that have to be managed while  
17 they're there, as well as other issues, behavioral,  
18 mental health. So, we want to be sure that as we're  
19 strengthening these areas or these settings where we  
20 can send older adults to, that they're really  
21 appropriate to the individual that we're sending  
there. So, again, this is an area that I'd like to  
spend a lot more time, advocate strongly to ensure  
that, again, our seniors and our older adults that  
have earned the right to age gracefully in place have

2 a place to call home and some place to really serve  
3 as a stable environment for them. We know that when  
4 older adults are unhoused, it really impacts every  
5 area of their life. Very difficult for you to  
6 maintain your health. Very difficult for you to  
7 maintain relationships when you're constantly moving  
8 around and may not have that stability so, it's a  
9 major area of focus for us.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: And I just want  
11 to follow up on the question about funding. Your cuts  
12 in federal funding, the City's making that up, but at  
13 the same time, the City's looking for savings in all  
14 of the agencies. Your Fiscal 2027 budget is less,  
15 it's about 32 million dollars less than the Fiscal  
16 2026 budget at adoption. And then add to that, you  
17 mentioned inflation, rising fuel costs, food costs of  
18 food, just about rising costs in everything. So, how  
19 are you going to be able to balance that and still be  
20 able to provide the appropriate services to our  
21 senior communities? Loaded question, I know.

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, the  
19 32-million-dollar difference, that that doesn't  
20 include the discretionary money so, the reduction you  
21 see from point A to point B doesn't include

2 discretionary. And so as we mentioned earlier, we  
3 tend to look at the budgets every month to see, for  
4 example, where specific issues or concerns from  
5 providers are coming to, those that are  
6 underspending, we move those to basic overspending  
7 and covering costs. So, we've been doing that  
8 delicate balance on a regular monthly basis.

9 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: And I have  
10 to say, we're not alone in this effort. We are in  
11 constant discussions with OMB, just to be sure that  
12 we have the appropriate funding to be able to  
13 continue the services that we need to offer for our  
14 older adults.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: And we have older  
16 adults who don't want to receive prepared meals, but  
17 need help buying healthy produce, healthy food that  
18 they can cook themselves. And we have in many places,  
19 like I mentioned, we have food deserts and lack of  
20 adequate green markets and supermarkets. How can DFTA  
21 help kind of close that gap?

22 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, DFTA  
23 has done a great job in sponsoring farmers market,  
24 nutrition programs, and giving older adults access to  
25 coupon booklets. And when you look at some of the

2 numbers over the last year or so, we do notice that  
3 we have been able to distribute 70,000 coupons, and  
4 these booklets have been used through the end of last  
5 October. This represents 1.75 million given directly  
6 to older adults, and we'll continue to sponsor these  
7 programs because we know there (TIMER CHIME) are food  
8 deserts in some places where folks cannot get these  
9 fresh produce items that are so central to their  
10 budget or central to their life, central to their  
11 health. We talk about food being medicine. You want  
12 to make sure that folks that have access to these  
13 healthy vegetables and fruits and things that they  
14 need for a healthy living. So, that is one way that  
15 we're addressing the issue.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

18 That's a lot of questions. With the  
19 recent start of new Administration, the time required  
20 to appointment new commissioners and the budgetary  
21 concerns regard City's fiscal outlook. The  
preliminary plan did not include many new needs and  
the program expansion. Can DFTA provide the Committee  
with new needs request that are proposed not in this  
Fiscal Year?

2 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, I'll  
3 say our needs always outpace our resources,  
4 unfortunately. My nine days in, I haven't had an  
5 adequate chance yet to really assess where the new  
6 need capacity would be, where it is that we actually  
7 need to focus more of our new needs on. So, we will  
8 ask that we are able to come back and present some of  
9 these new needs.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. And the  
11 OAC updates. The preliminary Committee plan include  
12 6.0 million in Fiscal 2026 funded by Brooklyn Borough  
13 President for innovation at 15 OAC sites. Can DFTA  
14 confirm the sites are being funded and provide detail  
15 on the scope of each projects?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
17 We'll share that with you, yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: It is done? All the  
19 funding?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No.  
21 They're basically -- it's new allocation of funding  
to different sites. They're in the process of  
basically the funding being used.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay.

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: And  
3 we'll share the list with you guys.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: And also, there's a  
5 lot of capital request also. You guys have idea how  
6 many capital request has NYC Aging received from  
7 providers so far in Fiscal 2026?

8 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: We haven't  
9 received the final number yet, but when we do have  
10 that information, we'll be happy to share it with  
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay.

13 For the Leonard Covello Older Adult  
14 Center upgrade, the Preliminary Plan includes 7.7  
15 million across five years funded by the Council and  
16 additional 11.3 million across a 10-year capital  
17 commitment fund by Administration for this OAC. What  
18 kind of repair and innovation will this project  
19 address at this site? What's the timeline of this  
20 repair?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, it's  
actually, it's a huge, it's roof, it's a boiler, it's  
a kitchen. It's a City-owned site, so it's a lot of  
renovation that's occurring. Again, we don't manage  
the project, it's being managed by DDC. We can't give

2 you exactly the information you want in terms of  
3 timeline.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: So who is overseeing?

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: DDC.

6 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: DDC.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: It's a  
8 DDC project. It's a City-owned site. So again, a lot  
9 of it's repairs to the roofs, the boilers, the  
10 elevators, so it's a very extensive repair job.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: So all the repairs is  
12 DDC, not you guys?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.  
14 Like I said, as the Commissioner mentioned earlier,  
15 we have a capital budget, but a lot of it's managed  
16 by other City agencies, a big chunk of it is actually  
17 managed by DDC. Some of the projects are managed by  
18 HPD, some of them are managed by EDC, and some of  
19 them are actually managed by NYCHA. So, we're just  
20 kind of, that's, you see a lot of money, a lot of it  
21 we work with different agencies to kind of get a lot  
of these repairs done.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: The PMMR indicates  
that there was a decrease in number of caregiver  
persons served in the first four months of Fiscal

2 2026. In the past four months of Fiscal 2026, a total  
3 of 1,971 caregivers were served, a decrease of 20.5  
4 percent from previous year. Why fewer caregiver?

5 Suppose, in my mind, with the data, the number of  
6 people growing, the caregiver should increase, why  
there's decrease?

7 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Thank you.

8 And I understand that it's an issue that has to do  
9 with Vive (phonetic) and our data collection methods,  
10 so you may not have all of the accurate information  
11 there. So, I would ask that we're allowed to come  
12 back and share the information once we've kind of  
re-evaluated and made sure that it's accurate.

13 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Got it. Thank you.

14 So, the Preliminary Plan includes 19.7  
15 million in City funding, which is baselined,  
16 beginning in Fiscal 2027, for the indirect cost of  
17 human service contract. Why was additional funding  
required? Does NYC Aging anticipate additional  
funding to be added in the outyears?

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, the  
19 19 million dollars is for the indirect cost rate, so  
20 that's actually cost for overhead for the providers.  
21 So, that was actually not baselined in the current,

2 when the OMB funded all the federal funding, that  
3 piece is actually missing, so now that's being  
4 baselined going forward. Same thing with the COLA,  
5 like you mentioned the 6.9 million dollars, that's  
6 also the COLA for providers, it's also being  
7 baselined. So as providers, basically, every three  
8 years, providers have an opportunity to submit for  
9 their indirect cost rate, those indirect cost rates  
are captured in that, and that's part of the increase  
over time.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Does the cost of  
11 living adjustment apply to all contracts providers in  
12 NYC Aging's network?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes. As  
14 all contracts effective of 2024.

15 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay.

16 Council Member Mealy.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Just in between, I  
18 know we gave the 5 million dollars, how is that  
19 going?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: It's  
21 going very, very well. We have a lot of, like I said,  
some of them are less than 100,000, so you have a lot  
of repairs, and we have purchases as well, so things

2 are going very well. We have two major projects, two  
3 major big projects that we're keeping a close eye on.  
4 These are huge.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Two major big  
6 projects.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.  
8 There's two of them, one 650,000, another one's, I  
9 think it's not off the top of my head, but we're  
10 keeping an eye on them because those are very big,  
11 extensive renovations. But overall, we're basically,  
12 I mean, we're actually meeting with City Council  
13 funds, hopefully by April to give them a status  
14 report on exactly all the spending and what's going  
15 to be met by June 30th. But yeah, again, we really  
16 appreciate the 5 million, hint, hint, we would like  
17 to have another one for '27, hint, hint. So. I think  
18 that's going very well. Like I said, it was a great  
19 partnership with us, and I think that will be really  
20 helpful. Again, as I mentioned earlier, this money  
21 goes directly to the providers to basically do a lot  
of major renovations.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's what I  
wanted to know, just how it was going. And if we do  
it again, will it benefit you?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I  
3 will actually also put another pitch in there. I know  
4 the Commissioner is going to kill me when I get back  
5 to the office. So, we would love to get some vans for  
6 transportation. Right, guys? So transportation, point  
7 A, point B, because again, seniors, again, even  
8 though we want our seniors to walk more, but  
9 sometimes the length to get to point A, point B is a  
10 little bit more than we expect. But again, sorry,  
11 Commissioner.

12 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: No. I  
13 absolutely agree. You lived (INAUDIBLE) another day.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That is perfect.  
15 And, Chair, could we put something in there? Because  
16 right now, to transport my seniors, I have to pay out  
17 of my pocket sometimes just to get the vans. They  
18 need to travel. So please, let's work on that. And  
19 then we need an outlook of how many of the vans for  
20 DFTA is in action and out of action, and what would  
21 it take to get the maintenance up and running to make  
sure that every senior center have a van to take  
their seniors places.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So, I  
just want to give you a little information so you

2 know that. There are about 300 plus vans, all our  
3 older adult centers. So, there's 300 vans. So, again,  
4 it's a very big ask. So, replacing all of them, some  
5 of them are more than 10 years old, but.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How much would that  
7 cost, do you think?

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We will  
9 get back to you on that. I can give you numbers.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. Because  
11 I just noticed New York City, I don't know what  
12 Department, but they got brand new Mustangs. So, I'm  
13 going to start asking. If they could get Mustangs, we  
14 could get some new vans. So, I'm ready. You got a  
15 partner right here.

16 Thank you, Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I actually  
18 went to one of the senior center, COPO. They got a  
19 new van through our Borough President. Yeah, from the  
20 capital program. I see some non-profit from my  
21 neighborhood also come here. They probably ask me,  
where's our van? And then we also have Council Member  
Aldebol has more questions.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER ALDEBOL: So, one more  
3 question. I promise, I think this will be my last  
4 one.

5 The State budget this year, you  
6 mentioned, somebody mentioned people stealing SNAP  
7 benefits. So, the State budget this year proposes  
8 money to transition to chip card technology to help  
9 stop SNAP skimming, which is affecting thousands of  
10 older adults. The legislature is also proposing a  
11 victim's compensation fund for those who have had  
12 their benefits stolen through skimming because now  
13 there's no recourse when people have their benefits  
14 stolen. Would DFTA support a State compensation fund  
15 or any other solutions to address SNAP skimming?

16 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, we  
17 always support equity and justice. So definitely, we  
18 would like to see the same information you have, but  
19 we would like to support any initiative that's going  
20 to be sure to protect our older adults from this type  
21 of activity.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I think  
get a new chip for the card is easier for seniors.

Thank you. Thank you, everyone.

And then now we move to public testimony.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Chair, could I ask  
3 one question about that?

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Okay. Is there  
5 anything going into to help the seniors? Because once  
6 their SNAP benefits has been taken, for the whole  
7 month, they have no food now. Do we have anything in  
8 place going forward? Because they can't get  
9 reimbursed. That's legislation to get the  
10 reimbursement, but some seniors go without food for  
11 that whole month.

12 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: So, I introduced a  
13 bill here. I wanted to answer your question. I  
14 introduced a bill to senior, if they get their food  
15 stamps skimmed, they can call 3-1-1, and require DFTA  
16 and HRA to send them information where the nearby  
17 food pantry.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: But they won't get  
19 their money back.

20 COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Or an OAC.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: At all.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCKENZIE: Well, I  
can't say that. I know in my opinion.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: The money, they don't  
get back. That's federal law.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm going to talk  
3 to the Congressperson. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

5 Okay. Let's move to the public testimony.  
6 Thank you.

7 Okay. Now, we open the hearing for the  
8 public testimony. I want to remind members of public  
9 that this is a government proceeding and the decorum  
10 shall be observed at all time. As such, members of  
11 public shall remain silent at all time.

12 The witness table is reserved for people  
13 who wish to testify. No video recording or  
14 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
15 Further, member of the public may not present audio  
16 or video recording as testimony, but may submit a  
17 transcript of such recording to the Sergeant-at-Arms  
18 for including in the hearing record.

19 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
20 please fill out appearance card with Sergeant-at-Arms  
21 and wait to recognized. When recognized, you will  
22 have two minutes to speak on today's topic. If you  
23 have a written testimony or additional written  
24 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please  
25 provide a copy of that testimony to the

2 Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written  
3 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72  
4 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings  
will not be accepted.

5 The first group, we have Catherine  
6 Thurston, Beth Finkel, Marcus Jackson, Linda Hoffman,  
7 Anita Kwok.

You can start.

8 CATHERINE THURSTON: Good afternoon. I'm  
9 Catherine Thurston. I'm the CEO of Service Program  
10 for Older People, or SPOP. Thank you, Committee Chair  
11 Zhuang and Committee Members, for this opportunity to  
address the New York City Committee Council on Aging.

12 SPOP plays a unique role in supporting  
13 the health, emotional wellbeing, and independence of  
14 older New Yorkers. We are the only agency in the city  
15 that is exclusively dedicated to community-based  
16 mental health for older adults, and we provide  
17 outpatient treatment to 1,000 adults each year. We've  
18 been doing this work for over 45 years, and we offer  
19 services via telehealth, at our offices on the Upper  
West Side of Manhattan, and at satellite locations in  
20 Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan. We are only as  
21 strong as our network of community partners. And we

1 work with NYC Aging and dozens of hospitals, older  
2 adult centers, and aging service providers to reach  
3 out to isolated adults who would otherwise have no  
4 access to mental healthcare. Nearly one in four older  
5 adults in New York City experiences a mental health  
6 challenge, and about 6 percent live with a serious  
7 mental illness such as schizophrenia or severe  
8 depression, which can affect their ability to  
9 function and live independently. For an older adult  
10 with serious mental illness plus chronic medical  
11 illness, mobility impairment, and the cumulative  
12 effects of decades without appropriate care, life is  
13 very difficult. While NYC Aging has worked to meet  
14 the needs of older adults in New York City with  
15 mental health needs through the DGMH initiative, one  
16 program is not enough to meet the complex needs of  
17 those who are most vulnerable. We hear from  
18 colleagues across the sectors that the current  
19 structures do not work for older adults with serious  
20 mental illness. Most mental health programs for  
21 people with SMI are designed for younger adults and  
are not equipped to support clients who are also  
managing cognitive changes, fragile health, social  
isolation, and the practical realities (TIMER CHIME)

2 of later life. Aging services meanwhile are often not  
3 equipped to provide robust psychiatric care. We  
4 therefore urge the Committee to advocate for robust  
5 funding for programs and services that support older  
6 adults, including community-based age-affirming  
7 mental health care for older partners with serious  
8 mental illness. Thank you for your work on behalf of  
9 older adults and for the opportunity to testify  
10 today.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

12 LINDA HOFFMAN: Good afternoon. I'm Linda  
13 Hoffman. I am President of New York Foundation for  
14 Senior Citizens and, on behalf of our Board of  
15 Directors, I would deeply appreciate your ensuring  
16 the continuation of our home sharing and respite care  
17 program, which is citywide, by providing support for  
18 the funding that we've requested from the Speaker's  
19 citywide budget, from allocations from your  
20 individual as well as your borough delegations'  
21 budgets. Our home sharing program, which many of you  
know about and have been supporting forever and we  
deeply appreciate, is implemented by social workers  
who use their professional skills to successfully  
match older adults we call hosts with extra space in

1 their apartments and houses to share with  
2 responsible, compatible guests in need of affordable  
3 housing. One of the matchmates must be over the age  
4 of 60. While last year was a banner year, in 45 years  
5 we had never matched more than 100 people but we did  
6 that last year as Council Member Brewer mentioned,  
7 and this year already we've matched 74 hosts and  
8 guests and we've got a couple of matches still  
9 pending so we think we're even going to exceed that  
10 number for this year, which at a total cost of 553  
11 dollars per person, a one-time cost as opposed to  
12 spending what, 500,000 to build an apartment in New  
13 York City. The findings from a study that we've done  
14 for the last Fiscal Year was, as Council Member  
15 Brewer mentioned, we received 205,000 dollars total  
16 from the City Council funding and we saved the City  
17 over 1.7 million in Medicaid and other expenses for  
18 ensuring these individuals had affordable housing,  
19 were not in homeless shelters, and not  
20 institutionalized in nursing homes. (TIMER CHIME)  
21 Along with providing significant savings in Medicaid,  
other expenses, our respite care component also is  
providing services for the frail elderly at home care  
services for people above the Medicaid level, those

2 who are spending down for ISEP and Medicaid home care  
3 at \$19.65 an hour when these agencies are charging  
4 double that and making a profit. So, the funding we  
5 received for this service under the same umbrella as  
6 home sharing is really helping us to just find the  
7 appropriate home care workers to ensure that they are  
8 matched appropriately with those who need in-home  
9 care, whether they're struggling to live on their own  
10 or they're managing with the help of caregivers who  
11 may need some time off. Our program is totally  
12 dependent upon government funding each and every year  
13 to continue to fill its ever-increasing number of  
14 citywide service requests. And to ensure that the  
15 program remains fiscally viable throughout our fiscal  
16 year, we would deeply appreciate your support in  
17 providing the funding we've requested from the  
18 Speaker's budget, the federal delegation budgets, and  
19 your individual budgets. And thank you very much for  
20 your past and hopefully ongoing support.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I think  
18 it's an amazing program. But I just want to remind  
19 everyone, everyone's time is two minutes. Thank you.  
20 I did not want to interrupt you.

2           MARCUS JACKSON: Good afternoon,  
3 Chairperson and the Committee. My name is Marcus  
4 Jackson. I'm joining you today in my capacity as  
5 Director of Advocacy and Government Relations with  
6 Encore Community Services. Encore is one of New York  
7 City's largest aging service agencies. We deliver  
8 more than 800,000 home-delivered meals each year to  
9 older adults who are homebound, many of them isolated  
10 and managing serious infirmity. For many of the  
11 people we serve, the meal we bring them is the only  
12 one they eat all day, and often the volunteer who  
13 delivers it is the only person they see, which is why  
14 I want to use my time today to speak about Intro.  
15 0280. This measure would require home-delivered meals  
16 every day of the calendar year, including weekends  
17 and holidays. That's the right policy. But there's  
18 something the Committee should know. Weekend meals  
19 already exist for some of our clients funded through  
20 arrangements that reimburse providers below what it  
21 actually costs. Encore loses money every weekend we  
deliver meals. We do it anyway because these are our  
neighbors and that's what we do. But that's not a  
sustainable model. And it shouldn't fall to community  
organizations to quietly cover the gap in public

2 policy. One in five older New Yorkers struggle with  
3 food insecurity. The people we serve aren't missing  
4 meals because they forgot to shop. They cannot leave  
5 their homes, and many cannot cook safely. We strongly  
6 support this bill's passage with one condition. The  
7 mandate must come with reimbursement rates that  
8 actually reflect what it costs to do the work. A  
9 mandate without real funding shifts the problem. It  
10 doesn't solve it. A City-funded home-delivered meals  
11 stop on weekends, hunger doesn't, isolation doesn't  
12 as well. Encore has been showing up for older New  
13 Yorkers for half a century, so we really want to pass  
14 this bill, fund it fully, and work together to make  
15 sure that all older New Yorkers receive two meals a  
16 day, and at least a knock on their door every day.  
17 Thank you for your time.

18 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. You're on  
19 time.

20 BETH FINKEL: Hi. I'm Beth Finkel. I'm the  
21 State Director for AARP New York. All the groups with  
me here are actual providers. I think what's unique  
about me bringing perspective of AARP is that we are  
a membership organization, and in the five boroughs  
we have almost three quarters of a million members

2 just in New York City, and how the services of these  
3 providers and others affect their lives is incredibly  
4 important, not just to the people who are receiving  
5 the service, but to their family members who are  
6 caregivers, and the typical caregiver is a woman in  
7 her 50s who is working, either part-time or  
8 full-time, and so we know what the stresses mean for  
9 caregivers also. Without caregivers in New York, the  
10 whole long-term care system would fall apart because  
11 that is the backbone of taking care of older people.  
12 If those people have to move into Medicaid or  
13 institutional services, we know that Medicaid will be  
14 the payer, so then we will all pay.

15           So, what I want to address here today,  
16 and it came up earlier, is that the budget right now  
17 for DFTA is under one half of 1 percent, and yet the  
18 population of the 65-plus in New York is at 20  
19 percent, so I want to bring up the factor of  
20 disparities here and also of ageism, because it's  
21 inherent. If populations are not receiving what they  
need, then there is some background of disregard,  
which we interpret as ageism and disrespect. So, this  
is about affordability. We also know that older  
adults, the increase in people in poverty has gone up

2 in the last 10 years almost 50 percent. 50 percent  
3 more older adults are in poverty. So that's the other  
4 component. I'm not reading from my testimony, because  
5 you have it.

6 The last factor I want to talk about is  
7 the federal dollars. We know as the federal dollars  
8 are going to diminish, and they already are affecting  
9 people (TIMER CHIME) last resort are all of these  
10 providers. This is where people will land. If they  
11 don't get the social services, the information and  
12 referrals, the food, you talked about SNAP before,  
13 this is where they're going to come, and this system  
14 is not equipped to be able to handle it, and we have  
15 to get ahead of it. So, thank you very much for your  
16 time today. I appreciate it.

17 ANITA KWOK: Thank you, Chair Zhuang, for  
18 convening this budget hearing and for Council Members  
19 Brewer and Aldebol for staying for public testimony.  
20 My name is Anita Kwok. I am a Policy Analyst at  
21 United Neighborhood Houses. We're also a membership  
organization of settlement houses across New York.  
For my verbal testimony, I'm going to focus on  
congregate meals and NORCs. So, when it comes to food  
budget at older adult centers, I truly cannot stress

1 how dire the situation is. It's the top issue that we  
2 are hearing from providers who year after year are  
3 asked to do more with less. The congregate meals  
4 budget hasn't increased since the last procurement in  
5 2021, and in a focus group of our aging providers, we  
6 found that while food inflation has increased 22  
7 percent, wholesale food costs for providers has  
8 increased as much as 76 percent. But despite these  
9 fiscal challenges, older adult centers continue to do  
10 everything they can to remain lifelines and provide  
11 nutritious, culturally appropriate meals for older  
12 adults. But with SNAP and new ABAWD rules, demand for  
13 congregate meals will only grow, which is why we're  
14 calling for a 60-million-dollar investment in the  
15 congregate meals budget for Fiscal Year '27. UNH is  
16 also launching a NORC in Every Neighborhood campaign  
17 where we urge a 10-million-dollars investment to  
18 build NORCs in the 31 neighborhoods that do not have  
19 one, such as Sheepshead Bay and Borough Park. NORCs  
20 are a cost-effective model that strengthens the  
21 wellbeing of older adults and delays more costly  
intervention, such as nursing homes. Prior to joining  
a NORC, 49 percent of surveyed older adults said that  
they felt socially isolated, but after joining, that

2 percentage fell to 17 percent. In every neighborhood  
3 of our city, from Bushwick to Flushing, there are  
4 thousands of older adult residents who would benefit  
5 from a contracted NORC program in their neighborhood,  
6 and 10 million dollars is needed to make that happen.  
7 Our other budget priorities are to budget the NORC  
8 nursing in the Council initiative of 1 million  
9 dollars, invest 30 million dollars in home delivered  
10 meals, and expand the Council's emergency  
11 infrastructure fund to 10 million dollars. If our  
12 city wants our older adults to age in dignity in  
13 their communities, we have to make investments to  
14 make that possible. (TIMER CHIME)

15 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Perfect timing. Thank  
16 you.

17 I have some questions. I love the  
18 home-sharing program. Which borough has the most  
19 home-sharing program?

20 LINDA HOFFMAN: It's neck and neck between  
21 Brooklyn and Manhattan.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: What type of  
population easier to get for this program?

LINDA HOFFMAN: The type of population  
varies.

2 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Varies.

3 LINDA HOFFMAN: It's mostly older adults.

4 We have to match people who are, at least one of whom

5 is over the age of 60. By the way, we have, I think,

6 about 19 percent of our population are immigrants.

7 And people who are, some who are living on just

8 Social Security, they call, they have 800 dollars a

9 month or less. There are people who, from retired

10 teachers, home care workers, retired City employees.

11 People who have been on the verge of eviction, and

12 we've prevented eviction, and foreclosure. And mixed

13 ages, but mixed ethnicities, mixed religions. We have

14 found that the trick to having compatible, successful

15 matches is when there's a common interest and common

16 values. It has nothing to do with anyone's background

17 or family or anything. And when we do a pre-match

18 meeting, after we've done very comprehensive vetting

19 to ensure that these are appropriate individuals for

20 matching and home-sharing, we require a license

21 agreement, which indicates all of the agreed-upon

amounts of money that the guests will pay to the

host, which very often are less than 1,000 dollars a

month for a full bedroom, a bath. In some instances,

they share baths. Each situation is different, both

2 in homes and in apartments. And in some instances, by  
3 the way, we have hosts and sometimes guests who have  
4 pets, and we've matched the hosts and guests with  
5 pets as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: This program can save  
7 a lot of money for New York City. It also sounds like  
8 a marriage. What's the percentage of divorce?

9 LINDA HOFFMAN: Fortunately, there are  
10 very few divorces, many more statistically than exist  
11 in marriages. But if, in fact, we do have to undo a  
12 match, we're right there. We have trained MSW, New  
13 York State Licensed Social Workers, who are very,  
14 very careful. And in some instances, there are some  
15 personality situations that can't work. But usually,  
16 we work them through and we manage because we have  
17 this pre-match agreement where people indicate what  
18 parts of the home they're allowed to use, where in  
19 the refrigerator they put their foods, whether  
20 they're going to eat together, not eat together,  
21 where they have alcohol in the home, guests in the  
home. It's been very successful over the years.  
Matter of fact, we have a new video. Our star of the  
video happens to be Beth Finkel, who has been very  
supportive of this program, which has been going on

2 for 45 years successfully. We've never had a really  
3 unsuccessful situation because we've been so, so  
4 careful. We could do a lot more matches than even the  
5 100 we did last year, but at the same time, we want  
6 to be careful that they are safe.

7 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I'm really  
8 enjoying hearing this program. I'd love to come to  
9 see also. And also, that's the program able to save  
10 money and maybe we can move the money to the other  
11 program.

12 LINDA HOFFMAN: Well, we have it under one  
13 umbrella, so we cost allocate. Some of the social  
14 workers actually spend their time between both  
15 programs, so nobody's sitting there twiddling their  
16 thumbs. The calls are coming in. They're desperate  
17 for affordable home care. They're desperate for  
18 affordable housing.

19 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. Thank you.

20 Okay. Council Member Mealy.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That program sounds  
awesome. So, how do you promote it?

LINDA HOFFMAN: Good question. We've  
actually, have you been on the subways? We've been on

2 the subways lately. It's very expensive, but if you  
3 have --

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I didn't understand  
5 it on the subways, so I'm glad now I got the  
6 connection.

7 LINDA HOFFMAN: From the middle of  
8 February, and we're going to do it through March. We  
9 do constant social media on our website. We've sent  
10 56,000 postcards to older adults who are renters and  
11 homeowners citywide. So, we constantly have to  
12 promote it because once you make a match, you lose  
13 the host unless the host has, and we have some  
14 instances where the host has two extra bedrooms, not  
15 one, and once they realize that it's a very helpful  
16 and positive, beneficial experience, they often want  
17 to rent out the second bedroom.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm going to put  
19 that on one of our lists when we're doing our speed  
20 friendship-ing.

21 LINDA HOFFMAN: Yeah.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Just getting to  
23 know each other, not dating. Friendship-ing. So, I'm  
24 asking, do you need a partner to live with?

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2 LINDA HOFFMAN: We will send -- we have --  
3 we will send you --

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm going to talk  
5 with you after to make sure.

6 LINDA HOFFMAN: -- we'll send you  
7 material --

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

9 LINDA HOFFMAN: -- to distribute. We've  
10 sent it over the years, and we have posters, palm  
11 cards, and brochures.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'll be your  
13 advertisement now. So, thank you.

14 Thank you so much, Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. Let's have  
16 next group.

17 Okay, we have a second group.

18 Abbie Rubin-Pope, Joseph Rizzi, Catherine  
19 Suero, Lydia Ortiz Weiss, Ines De La Nuez.

20 You can begin. Just to remind you, two  
21 minutes.

22 INES DE LA NUEZ: Good afternoon,  
23 everyone. My name is Ines De La Nuez, and I am the  
24 Director for Grand Street Settlement Grand Coalition  
25 of Older Adults. Thank you, Chair Zhuang and Members

26

2 of the New York City Council Committee on Aging, for  
3 the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the  
4 FY27 preliminary budget.

5 Grand Street Settlement is a 110-year-old  
6 multi-services settlement house. We serve over 18,000  
7 New Yorkers through vital services, early childhood,  
8 youth, and older adult program. Grand Street is  
9 committed to health and well-being of the older adult  
10 we serve on the Lower East Side. The Grand Coalition  
11 of Older Adults Center, funded by New York City  
12 Aging, is located at 80 Pitt Street, and is a second  
13 home to many older adults. We provide communal  
14 nutritious meals and a host and array of  
15 intergenerational health and wellness and educational  
16 and cultural services. We offer robust program for  
17 cultural celebration, advocacy, initiative, and  
18 engagement. At this hearing, we urge the New York  
19 City Council and the Mamdani Administration to  
20 strengthen or preserve program serving older adults  
21 by making a sustaining investment in New York City  
aging population, including establishing baseline  
funding for the city older adult programs. The  
proposed 100 million in budget cuts will have severe  
consequences for older adults who rely on

2 organizations like Grand Street Settlement for  
3 critical services. Below, we are advocating for an  
4 investment of 10 million to expand the number of  
5 naturally occurring retirement community, NORC, in  
6 every neighborhood. Baseline long-standing NORC  
7 (INAUDIBLE) support that is part of the City Council  
8 NORC initiative of approximately 1 million dollars,  
9 increase congregate meal budget at Older Adults  
10 Center by 60 million (TIMER CHIME) to convert  
11 inflation, and invest 30 million to expand home  
12 delivery meals to seven days a week, and maintain the  
13 Council 10 million emergency capital infrastructure  
14 fund for Older Adults Center. Thank you.

15 JOSEPH RIZZI: Good afternoon, ladies and  
16 gentlemen, distinguished Chairperson of the New York  
17 City Department of Aging Council Member, Susan  
18 Zhuang, and Members of the City Council. My name is  
19 Joseph Rizzi. I'm the Director of External Affairs  
20 for the Federation of Italian American Organizations  
21 of Brooklyn, and I bring warm greetings from our  
Chairman of the Board, Mr. Jack Spatola, and the  
entire Board staff and thousands of members of our  
diverse community who use the federation services.  
Thanks to NORCs initiative, the naturally occurring

2 retired community, FIAO has been able to provide  
3 quality service only two days a week to the older  
4 adult population. Our participants are provided with  
5 a complete program that includes use of the  
6 state-of-the-art wellness center, swimming, chair  
7 yoga, art and craft, bingo, Zumba, mental health, and  
8 meals, among other things. It serves only 100 older  
9 adults each day, 100 on Thursday and the other one on  
10 Friday, with many on the waiting list. We have the  
11 numbers and the capability to provide this program  
12 for five days if funding would be made available. In  
13 addition, our older adult community, during the  
14 course of the year, has the opportunity to  
15 participate in many multicultural events, which  
16 include Lunar New Year, which just happened and  
17 you've been able to be witness to, Italian heritage  
18 and culture, Hispanic culture, Eid al-Fitr, which  
19 we're preparing right now, Black heritage, as well as  
20 senior proms, and many others. I made a little  
21 notation there that some of you have already  
witnessed these things, so you know what I'm talking  
about, and you've been participants. These services  
provide the older adults, most of whom are alone,  
widowed, and (TIMER CHIME) in need of support with

2 the opportunity to come to a welcoming place to feel  
3 like members of an extended family, with a purpose in  
4 life, and an opportunity to be productive members of  
5 the community. FIAO, respectively, requests to be put  
6 on the NORC initiative while waiting for the  
7 Department of Aging to promulgate the new RFPs,  
8 allowing other CBOs like ours to apply for funding.  
9 On behalf of our older adult community that FIAO  
10 serves, we thank you for all the leadership and  
11 support you have provided to us thus far, and for the  
12 financial future and support that you will be  
13 providing to serve those on the waiting list for the  
14 five days requested. Thank you.

15 ABBIE RUBIN-POPE: Good afternoon, Chair  
16 Zhuang and the Members of the Committee. My name is  
17 Abbie Rubin-Pope, and I'm a Policy and Advocacy  
18 Associate at UJA Federation of New York. Thank you  
19 for the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year '27  
20 preliminary budget.

21 UJA supports nearly 100 non-profit  
partners across New York City, allocating roughly 200  
million annually to serve older adults and vulnerable  
New Yorkers. Today, we urge the Council to protect  
and strengthen the aging services system at a moment

of growing need. First, maintain the cost-of-living adjustment for non-profit human service workers.

These workers care for older adults, deliver meals, provide case management, and respond in times of crisis, yet they remain underpaid. Without sustained COLA support, we will continue to see high turnover and workforce instability that weakens the safety net for older New Yorkers.

Second, invest in older adult centers and critical infrastructure. Across the city, centers are operating in deteriorating facilities with broken HVAC systems, kitchens, elevators, and unsafe conditions. We urge the Council to fully fund the 60-million-dollar increase for congregate meals, maintain the 5-million-dollar emergency infrastructure fund, reform capital eligibility rules for centers and City-owned buildings, including NYCHA, and improve interagency coordination to resolve building issues.

Third, fully fund nutrition services. Congregate and home-delivered meals are preventative healthcare. Years of flat funding combined with rising food costs have put providers at risk.

2 Fourth, strengthen the naturally  
3 occurring retirement communities, or NORCs. Rising  
4 nursing costs are stringing these proven  
5 aging-in-place models, and increased support is  
6 essential. We support an additional investment of 1  
7 million dollars for nursing services, and we also  
8 support UNH's NORC in Every Neighborhood campaign to  
9 expand NORCs to the 31 neighborhoods in New York City  
10 currently without one.

11 Finally, we respectfully urge the Council  
12 to maintain the 4.2 million dollars for the Holocaust  
13 Survivors Initiative. Survivors are now in their 80s  
14 and 90s, facing complex medical and trauma-related  
15 needs. Many providers maintain wait lists. There is  
16 limited time left to ensure survivors live the  
17 remaining years with dignity.

18 New York's older adult population is  
19 growing, and the City (TIMER CHIME) must match that  
20 growth with sustained investment. Thank you for your  
21 leadership and partnership.

CATHERINE AGRAMONTE: Good afternoon,  
Chair Zhuang and Members of the Committee. My name is  
Catherine Agramonte. I am an In-State Coordinator and  
Case Manager, speaking today on behalf of Wellness

1 Together University Settlement in support of  
2 increased funding for home-delivered meals for older  
3 adults. The home-delivered meals program provides  
4 daily nutritious meals to homebound seniors who are  
5 unable to shop for or prepare food on their own.  
6 Beyond meals, this program also offers case  
7 management and critical wellness checks for  
8 individuals who are at high risk of social isolation.  
9 At Wellness Together University Settlement, our  
10 program serves over 1,000 vulnerable homebound New  
11 Yorkers in the Lower East Side and Chinatown  
12 community, which is Community Board District 3. For  
13 many of these older adults, these meals are not just  
14 a supplement. They are their primary source of daily  
15 nutrition. The home-delivered meals program not only  
16 meets participants' most basic nutritional needs, but  
17 it also provides our most socially isolated  
18 participants with daily social interaction. The meal  
19 delivery staff is capable of bringing critical  
20 information about our clients, which helps our older  
21 adult programs provide the support they need to live  
safely and independently. However, what we continue  
to see is that many recipients of home-delivered  
meals are still experiencing food insecurity. As a

2 result, our case managers and social workers  
3 frequently connect participants to additional  
4 resources, such as food pantries, city meals mobile  
5 grocery programs, and breakfast box distributions  
6 just to help them get through the week. This  
7 highlights the depth of need among a population that  
8 is often invisible and overlooked. Currently, the  
9 City only funds home-delivered meals five days per  
10 week, and we know that for homebound older adults,  
11 the need for reliable access to food exists every  
12 day. That is why the (TIMER CHIME) City must invest  
13 30 million to operationalize Council Member Linda  
14 Lee's Intro. 280 and ensure that meals are funded  
15 seven days a week. The investment would provide a  
16 consistent lifeline for thousands of New Yorkers who  
17 depend on these meals for their health, dignity, and  
18 independence. Thank you for the opportunity to  
19 testify.

20 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

21 LYDIA ORTIZ WEISS: Good afternoon, Chair  
and Members of the Council. My name is Lydia Ortiz  
Weiss, and I'm here to share the importance of  
programs that provide case management services and  
ISEP.

2           A few years ago, I had replacement  
3 surgery for both knees. My recovery was difficult.  
4 For nearly two years, I was homebound and mostly  
5 confined to my bed. Simple to say, daily tasks like  
6 getting dressed, preparing meals, and even moving  
7 around the home became overwhelming. I felt isolated,  
8 vulnerable, and unsure if I could ever be able to  
9 gain some of my mobility back. ISEP became my  
10 lifeline. This support allowed me to meet my daily  
11 needs and remain safe in my home. I gained some of my  
12 ability. Without it, I don't know what I would stay  
13 in my home. Even more vital was the importance of my  
14 case management. The case manager became my advocate,  
15 guiding me to resources I desperately need. Air  
16 condition during the heat, yep, legal help to protect  
17 my home when threatened with foreclosure, assistant  
18 devices to endure my safety in and out of my home,  
19 therapy to cope with grief after losing multiple  
20 loved ones during the global pandemic, companionship  
21 services that (TIMER CHIME) remind me I was not  
alone. These services didn't just meet my needs. They  
gave me hope, stability, and reassurance that someone  
cared. Programs like ISEP and case management are not  
just services, they are lifelines. The help people

2 endured with the hardness time with dignity, safety,  
3 and support. As our community grows, the need for  
4 these programs will only increase. I'm deeply  
5 grateful for the care that continue to service me.  
6 And I urge the City to continue investing in these  
7 programs so that my experience can change life  
8 support and made all the difference in the world.  
9 That's one. Because of the support I receive, I am  
10 here able to sit and give you my public testimony.  
11 Thank you for allowing me to share my story. Thank  
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. You a good  
14 job. Thank you.

15 Do you have a question?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. Thank you  
18 guys. Thank you.

19 And now let's invite to the third group.  
20 We have John Shin, Sonia Valentin, Christine Tse,  
21 Viviana Patanio, Kalman Bokow.

JOHN SHIN: Good afternoon, Chair Zhuang  
and Members of Committee on Aging. My name is John  
Shin. I'm the Program Director at Korean Community  
Services of Metropolitan New York or KCS, the largest

and oldest Korean American non-profit organization in the region, serving New York community since 1973.

KCS operates three OAC in Corona, Flushing, and Manhattan along with two community pop-up cafes in Flushing and Woodside. Together, this program have nearly 700 older adults in daily attendance, providing meals, social program, and supportive services to help seniors stay healthy and connected.

KCS also operates a major home delivered meal program, delivering more than 800 meals every day, over 220,000 meals annually to homebound seniors across New York City. This includes Korean and Chinese meal prepared by our team, as well as kosher, halal, and regular meals delivered through subcontractors. But these programs are far more than program. Last year, during one of the Friday deliveries, one of our drivers arrived at client's apartment and noticed something was off. The senior had fallen and was lying on the floor behind the locked door. She was barely crying. It was so soft that it could hardly be heard. Our driver immediately called our office, and I called 9-1-1. Emergency responders had to break open the door to reach her and take her to the hospital. She lived alone. If my

1 driver had not arrived that day, she likely would  
2 have remained on that exact floor for the next 72  
3 hours. Later, her case management supervisor from  
4 Self-Help called and told me, John, you and your  
5 staff literally saved her life. This is why HDM meals  
6 are not just nutrition services. They are part of the  
7 safety net that protects vulnerable older adults.  
8 This is why I urge the City to invest 30 million  
9 (TIMER CHIME) to strengthen home delivery meals and  
expanded services. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. I want to  
11 clarify in the previous panel also, it's 27 million.  
12 It's easier than 30 million.

13 SONIA VALENTIN: Hello. My name is Sonia  
14 Valentin, and I am an advocate for seniors in  
15 Bensonhurst and Bath Beach, Brooklyn, as well as  
16 being a senior myself. I attend FIAO's Community  
17 Center where families and many older adults are  
18 served. I use the gym, take arts and crafts classes,  
19 participate in mental health group sessions, and have  
20 meals there, but only on Thursdays or Fridays. On  
21 behalf of the 200 older adults, I thank the City  
Council, the Speaker Honorable Julie Menin, and our  
very own Honorable Susan Zhuang and Honorable Alexa

2 Avil'es for the NORC funding allocated for our older  
3 adults. However, we as well as other older adults on  
4 a waitlist would like to have these services every  
5 day of the week. These programs and services truly  
6 enhance the overall quality of life for me and our  
7 very diversified senior population of Latinos,  
8 Italians, Asians, Arabs, Russians, and Jewish  
9 residents. We respectfully request your support for  
10 the NORC initiative to expand the services to five  
11 days weekly as we also await the opportunity for the  
12 Department of Aging to reopen RFPs for additional  
13 CBOs like the Federation of Italian American  
14 Organizations, FIAO Brooklyn, to have a senior center  
15 for the ever-growing number of Southern Brooklyn  
16 older adults. Many of our seniors are widowed, single  
17 and lonely. Attending these programs helps them  
18 mentally, physically and emotionally. At FIAO  
19 Community Center, they make friends, are not lonely,  
20 feel better about themselves and have a reason to get  
21 up in the morning. Thank you, muchas gracias, mille  
grazie.

19 CHRISTINE TSE: Hello. My name is  
20 Christine Tse. I'm a senior and member of Federation  
21 Italian American Organization's Culture and Community

2 Center. I take advantage of all that it offers. Our  
3 program is only two days a week, and it is not  
4 enough. Five days a week is needed for our physical  
5 and mental health. I'm happy to have made new friends  
6 here. Sadly, one elderly friend shared that I'm the  
7 only person she has spoken to all week. I'm Chinese  
8 and, due to the diversity of people attending the  
9 center, I now appreciate other cultures, traditions,  
10 and foods. I have taste delicacies of their countries  
11 such as lasagna, pernil, quesadilla. FIAO's dance  
12 teachers taught us the cha-cha, la tarantella, and  
13 the hora. Please continue supporting our centers so  
14 older adult have a place to call home five days a  
15 week. Thank you.

16 VIVIAN PATANIO: Good afternoon, Susan,  
17 Chair, and Committee Members. I'm so happy to be here  
18 today and be able to add to what my friends here have  
19 also talked about, and I too am here to advocate and  
20 continued support for FIAO. I am not only a member,  
21 I'm also a senior and I'm an avid attendee of the Fun  
Fit program that they have for our seniors. For me,  
it's my second home. I think Mr. Rizzi, Sonia, and  
Christine have said much about it. All the programs  
that are available, the social services, also legal

2 services I have taken advantage of. I am a member so  
3 I can go there seven days a week, but there are many  
4 seniors in the community that are not able to and  
5 they look forward to being able to go to the senior  
6 designated days. So, the two days a week does not  
7 really accommodate the base in the community which is  
8 also very diverse. And allowing the seniors to  
9 connect with one another has a positive outcome. Not  
10 only for the seniors but for our community that we do  
11 these things together in one place. So for me, as I  
12 said, FIAO is my second home. I also have met so  
13 many, so many friends, members and older adults that  
14 are there and I look forward, I have a place to go  
15 to. Keep the mind active. Thank you so much for your  
16 commitment and your consideration to this.

17 KALMAN BOKOW: Hi. My name is Kalman  
18 Bokow, and I'm the Development Manager at India Home.  
19 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. India  
20 Home is a leading non-profit organization dedicated  
21 to serving the unique needs of older adults from  
South Asian and other immigrant communities across  
New York City. Since our founding in 2007, we have  
provided culturally appropriate services including  
congregate meals, case management, mental health

1 programs, and recreational activities to thousands of  
2 older adults. Our work ensures that immigrant seniors  
3 who are often underserved and isolated have access to  
4 the critical resources they need to age with dignity  
5 in their communities. Aging services in New York are  
6 unprepared to support seniors in the coming years.  
7 Community-based aging organizations such as India  
8 Home are crucial to supporting older adults. As part  
9 of Live On New York, we support the Age Strong  
10 2.3-billion-dollar multi-year campaign including 500  
11 million dollars for older adult centers, 10 million  
12 dollars to support natural occurring retirement  
13 community in every neighborhood, 90 million dollars  
14 for nutritional support and deeper collaboration  
15 between NYC Aging and HPD. Older adult New Yorkers  
16 rely on critical aging services including OACs  
17 because of their convenience and proximity to their  
18 neighborhoods. Many of our clients at India Home rely  
19 on our centers for their only hot meal of the day,  
20 essential case management services, and critical  
21 social interaction to combat isolation. The impact of  
not investing in New York's aging services will fall  
disproportionately on immigrant seniors who already  
face systemic barriers to accessing mainstream aging

2 services due to language, cultural, and financial  
3 constraints. The Age Strong approach will ensure that  
4 older adults have access to safe and affordable  
5 housing and robust community-based services that are  
6 essential to healthy, dignified aging. We urge you to  
7 commit to a robust increase in funding for older  
8 adult services so that New York seniors can age in  
9 place of dignity. Thank you for your time and for  
10 this valuable opportunity to testify.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you all. I  
12 don't need to ask questions because I'm familiar with  
13 every single one of you, and I appreciate the work  
14 KCS has been doing for the community. You know that  
15 you can also serve Brooklyn too. And also I come from  
16 an immigrant background. I came here when I was 20  
17 years old without English. I appreciate the work you  
18 guys are doing for immigrant seniors. I think it's  
19 needed.

20 And my Colleague, Council Member Mealy  
21 has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I actually only  
have one. I done put off another meeting so long, I  
have to go.

2           But I want to thank all of you. And even  
3 if we get the 30 million, we still have to do the  
4 advocacy because you can ask for five days a week and  
5 if people do not come five days a week, funding will  
6 be lost. So what I'm thinking, because I always try  
7 to do outside the box, soon as I have the meeting  
8 with the Commissioner, I'm going to see if we can get  
9 those vans that if y'all go two days a week at your  
10 center and you go two days, come to Brooklyn because  
11 we have domino games. We have interact with each  
12 other and, Chair, you just said, Mr. Rizzi, why you  
13 don't come to Brooklyn? So, I'm looking forward to  
14 coming to Brooklyn also. And that's my motto. No,  
15 he's in Brooklyn, but he's service only too. Oh,  
16 sorry. But you haven't said Brooklyn as of yet. So I  
17 would love for y'all to come. And that's the only way  
18 how we can keep our seniors active, vibrant, always  
19 looking fly because y'all look beautiful. I see y'all  
20 dress up. Thank you. And that's what we have to keep  
21 doing.

18           May she ask a question?

19           CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: (NO AUDIBLE RESPONSE)

20           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes.

2 CHRISTINE TSE: We ask for five days a  
3 week. It's not for the same people. It's a lot of  
4 people on the waiting list.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Oh, so then we  
6 should get the waiting list and get them to come out  
7 to different centers to make sure that we all, just  
8 because there's a waiting list, we still should have  
9 them go to any other senior center. But I feel we  
10 need the safety of the transportation. And then we  
11 get leaders to make sure everybody get back on the  
12 bus. We're going to be talking about this a lot. I  
13 thank you all for coming here today. Thank you,  
14 Chair. We're going to do this.

15 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

16 And before we invite next session, I want  
17 to thank Live On New York and AARP, Homecrest, UCA,  
18 and a lot of other non-profits, OACs, helped to  
19 organize today's rally. We need advocate for the  
20 seniors.

21 And the fourth group, we have Dr. Cynthia  
Maurer, Rihan Wu, Sabur Rashid (phonetic), Aaron Tax,  
Jeanette Estima.

You can begin.

2                   SABUR RASHID: Good afternoon, Chair  
3                   Zhuang and Members of the Committee on Aging. My name  
4                   is Sabur Rashid, and I've lived on the Lower East  
5                   Side for over two decades. I came to the Center for  
6                   Wellbeing and Happiness hoping to interact, connect,  
7                   and share my talent and skills with others. I was  
8                   pleasantly surprised with what I found. The Center  
9                   has given me the chance to give back as well as  
10                  receive. Through the arts and movement programs, I  
11                  found a place where I could strengthen my physical  
12                  wellbeing, prevent social isolation, connect with  
13                  other mature adults in a safe space, surrounded by  
14                  people who truly acknowledge, honor, and respect one  
15                  another. I've had the privilege of teaching a writing  
16                  class there, sitting with neighbors, helping them to  
17                  find their words, and tell their stories. Through  
18                  movement classes like yoga and tai chi, I've also  
19                  been able to maintain my own mobility and positivity  
20                  through these uncertain times. Community brings  
21                  people face-to-face, sharing what we know, sharing  
                  joy, affirming our worth as adults, able to learn new  
                  skills, elders with wisdom to share  
                  intergenerationally. For older adults on the Lower  
                  East Side, this place is a lifeline for longtime

2 residents who've watched our neighborhood change  
3 around us. The Center for Wellbeing and Happiness is  
4 one of the few spaces that still belongs to us, where  
5 we are welcomed, valued, and nurtured. The City  
6 Council's support makes all of this possible. We are  
7 requesting 30,000 dollars, preferably more, to keep  
8 these programs free and accessible for older adults  
9 who need them most. Please (TIMER CHIME) invest in  
10 the Center for Wellbeing and Happiness so we can keep  
11 creating, connecting, and thriving. Thank you very  
12 much.

13 AARON TAX: All right. Good afternoon,  
14 Chair, and Members of the New York City Council. My  
15 name is Aaron Tax, and I work for SAGE, the nation's  
16 largest and oldest organization dedicated to  
17 improving the lives of LGBTQ-plus older people. Since  
18 our founding in 1978, SAGE has worked tirelessly to  
19 advocate for policies and programs that empower  
20 LGBTQ-plus elders, ensuring they can age with  
21 dignity, security, and support. We've remained at the  
forefront of combating social isolation, housing  
insecurity, and healthcare disparities among LGBT  
older people. LGBT older people are often invisible,  
disconnected from services, and severely isolated

1 without traditional familial supports. They are far  
2 more likely to live alone and less likely to rely on  
3 adult children or other family members for informal  
4 caregiving. Because of these thin support networks,  
5 LGBTQ-plus older people need to rely on more  
6 community service providers for care as they age, yet  
7 they're often distrustful of mainstream providers  
8 because of a history of discrimination and  
9 mistreatment. The services, community, and support  
10 systems provided by SAGE are designed to address  
11 these gaps and serve as a lifeline for LGBTQ-plus  
12 elders in New York City. With an anti-LGBTQ-plus  
13 Administration in Washington, many LGBT older people  
14 face heightened fear and uncertainty about their  
15 rights, healthcare, and overall well-being. For  
16 thousands, SAGE is a lifeline to critical services,  
17 advocacy, and a supportive community, ensuring they  
18 do not face these challenges alone. In light of the  
19 climate and the needs, SAGE requests the restoration  
20 of our New York City Council funding at FY26 levels,  
21 along with additional support to sustain and enhance  
our vital services. Thank you.

JEANETTE ESTIMA: Good afternoon. My name  
is Jeanette Estima, and I'm the Director of Policy

2 and Advocacy at City Meals on Wheels. Thank you for  
3 the opportunity to testify.

4 City Meals addresses food insecurity for  
5 homebound older New Yorkers in three ways, by funding  
6 weekend meals for the City's Home Delivered Meals  
7 program, serving as an emergency food responder, and  
8 providing additional food to those who need more than  
9 the one meal they receive a day. In Fiscal Year '25,  
10 we provided 2.3 million meals to 22,000 older adults  
11 across all five boroughs and all of our programs. As  
12 you know, there is deep hunger among older adults who  
13 participate in congregate and home delivered meals.  
14 While these programs are critical anti-hunger  
15 interventions, they do not go far enough for people  
16 who cannot get to a grocery store or a food pantry  
17 for the two other meals that they need. That's why we  
18 developed two innovative, cost-efficient programs for  
19 the most food insecure meal recipients. Our Breakfast  
20 Box provides enough food for a second daily meal, and  
21 our Mobile Groceries program provides enough food for  
14 additional meals. These programs serve 2,600  
homebound older New Yorkers, and we're grateful to  
the Council for their support, which has allowed us  
to increase the amount and types of food that we

1 offer through these programs and to reach more  
2 people. We respectfully request a renewal of the  
3 funding we received from the Council for these  
4 various programs through various initiatives, and we  
5 also ask the Council to pass Intro. 280 with adequate  
6 funding and to include cost increases for home  
7 delivered meals and congregate meals at 90 million  
8 dollars total, and we also ask that there be an  
9 increase in the community food connection to a  
baseline of 100 million dollars. Thank you.

10           RIHAN WU: Good afternoon, Chair Zhuang  
11 and Members of Committee. My name is Rihan Wu. I'm a  
12 Center Director of Homecrest Community Service Older  
13 Adults Center, and part of my residents come from  
14 Chair's District. I'm honored to speak today because  
15 this work is extremely personal to me. Every day, I  
16 meet older adults come to my center, not only for  
17 service, but also comfort, friendship, and support.  
18 They trust us, and they feel belong here. To them,  
19 our center is the one place where they can feel seen,  
20 feel heard, and less alone. For nearly 30 years,  
Homecrest has served older adults in South Brooklyn,  
21 especially AAPI older adults. Many of them are low  
income with limited English. Older adults in our

1 community are facing isolation, rising costs, and  
2 barriers to basic services. Some need accessing  
3 benefits, some are lonely and need a safe, welcoming  
4 place where they can talk to others and feel part of  
5 community. Others need regular meals and programs  
6 that support their well-beings. This is what our  
7 center provides. We offer daily meals, workshops, and  
8 case management to access benefits, connect to health  
9 care, and affordable housing. We also build  
10 communities through activities like Tai Chi, dancing,  
11 art, and crafts, community chat room, and technology  
12 class to make sure our older adults stay active and  
13 connected and supported. From July 2024 to June 2025,  
14 we supported more than 100,000 older adults. When  
15 funding is not enough, it's not actually a budget  
16 issue. Behind every budget number is someone who  
17 needs support, who needs dignity, who needs  
18 community. That's why, as a member of Live On NY, we  
19 support a 2.3-billion-dollar investment in older New  
20 Yorkers, 500 million for expanded nutrition services,  
21 1 billion for (TIMER CHIME) expanded affordable  
housing, and 800 million for community services.  
Homecrest is also a proud member of 18 Percent and  
Growing Campaign lead by CACF, and we urge the

2 Council support its key priority, including 7.5  
3 million for the AAPI community support initiative, 10  
4 million for communities of color non-profit  
5 stabilization fund, and 4.5 million for access health  
6 initiative. Thank you so much for your commitment and  
7 leadership for the older New Yorker. Thank you.

8 DR. CYNTHIA MAURER: Hello. My name is Dr.  
9 Cynthia Maurer. I'm the Executive Director of  
10 Visiting Neighbors. We've had 54 years of serving  
11 seniors in New York City. We are so thankful for the  
12 City Council, you guys are our heroes, because you  
13 advocate for a population that without you, what  
14 would we do? And our seniors need us just as much as  
15 we need you. We provide health management, health  
16 advocacy, health and wellness programs, physical,  
17 mental, and emotional, friendly visiting, shop and  
18 escort, therapeutic walking, which by the way was a  
19 program that came out of the pandemic. We were  
20 working throughout the pandemic because our seniors  
21 would have otherwise been completely cut off. Our  
volunteers and our staff went into the offices the  
entire time and did some crazy things in order to  
survive and help our people, including go to 99 cent  
stores and buying plastic shower curtains. And we had

2 an amazing crew of volunteers who made masks for us,  
3 because our seniors otherwise would be all alone. And  
4 our population is from 60 to centenarian plus, our  
5 eldest is 107. We have 33 clients that are over 100.  
6 This is a population that is aging, guys, we are  
7 getting older. Over 10 years ago, 10, 12 years ago,  
8 our average age of senior coming in was 58, it's now  
9 89. However, we're seeing in this last year, a  
10 younger group of seniors coming in who either have  
11 illness like cancer, or they fell and they need  
12 temporary help. And then later we turn them into  
13 volunteers. And then when they're ready, they become  
14 seniors. We actually have second and third generation  
15 clients that have been with us. And we had a senior  
16 who said, you took such good care of my mom and now I  
17 need help, and that's why we want to continue to be  
18 here and we wouldn't be if you guys did not support  
19 us. (TIMER CHIME) The population we serve is diverse.  
20 And 98 percent of our clients can neither pay for  
21 help, nor private services, nor eligible for  
Medicaid. And when a client is with us, they're  
usually with us for the rest of this life. They are  
not like in and out as in a school program. They're  
with us and we see them age through that process. And

2 as their years go by, things happen, and more happens  
3 and we need to be there to support them. Last year,  
4 we provided direct services to over 875 seniors and  
5 guidance to 1,700 individuals, including caregivers  
6 who are frustrated and just needed to have some  
7 guidance or vent. And we are going to continue to  
8 help seniors deal with the myriad of issues that they  
9 face through our programs. And our volunteers are  
10 absolutely amazing. We really do believe they  
11 represent the absolute best of New York City. When  
12 people often say, well, New York is in a hurry, we  
13 are, we're always in a hurry, but we're kind and we  
14 care. And I can tell you right now, we have people  
15 from age 14 to 93 who volunteer who really do care  
16 about their neighbor. So, we're asking, please  
17 continue to support programs like us and us so that  
18 we can continue to be here, not only for our existing  
19 clients, but for the clients of years to come. I gave  
20 you a packet also just to show you, not only do we do  
21 life-saving things, like (TIMER CHIME) being able to  
help people get to and from doctor's appointments,  
being there to listen to if they have a diagnosis  
that they're scared about and encouraging them to get  
second opinions. We do sweet things too, like having

2 school children make up Valentine's cards. And you  
3 say, what's the big deal? Well, the seniors, when  
4 that's all they get, find this card and it makes  
5 their day. It's really sweet. So, there's a sample  
6 there of cards just to say the thank yous that the  
7 seniors are getting and they're just delightful. And  
8 some of them create pen pals with the students. And  
9 also we have a talent show coming up. So, you guys  
10 are welcome to come out and see seniors strut their  
11 stuff for New York City audience. All of our services  
12 are free because our clients don't have it. They  
13 don't have even the dollar, they really don't. And  
14 we're going to help and do whatever we can and thank  
15 you for your support.

16 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. Thank you  
17 so much. I don't have questions. I'm familiar with  
18 most of you guys. So, thank you.

19 Next group. The first one Eustacia Smith,  
20 Hew Rose Evans, Elizabeth Lee, Kevin Kiprovski.

21 Thank you. You can begin. Thank you.

EUSTACIA SMITH: Good afternoon. My name  
is Eustacia Smith. I'm from West Side Federation for  
Senior and Supportive Housing, serving 2,500  
low-income older adults in our housing and 1,500 in

our three older adult centers. Thank you to Chair Zhuang and the entire Committee for the opportunity to testify. As the Council noted, older adults make approximately 20 percent of the population. Yet when New York City allocates less than half of 1 percent of the total budget towards them, we are neglecting the people who made our city what it is today. If we want older New Yorkers to survive and thrive, we must increase the budget for older adult services. We need to dramatically scale up the available housing for older adults. Older adults are the fastest growing age group of people becoming homeless, and there were 520,000 people on wait lists for housing at last count. We opened a new residence in the Bronx in 2025, and out of the 25 apartments that were available through Housing Connect, we had well over 45,000 applicants, the majority of whom were extremely low income. In our three older adult centers where we provide meals to participants, we are beyond stretch due to the rising cost of food. There's not been an increase in funding since 2019, but the cost of fresh produce, dairy, and meat in the past six years has risen substantially. We cannot continue to provide the same quality of meals with

2 the same budget. We're forced to either reduce  
3 quality or take money from other places where it's  
4 also needed. Compounding this situation is the fact  
5 that we're seeing a dramatic increase in the number  
6 of seniors coming to our centers for meals, given the  
7 rising food insecurity. We are also seeing them come  
8 in hungrier because they have not eaten since the  
9 last time they were there. This is why we encourage  
10 the City to support all of the Age Strong demands,  
11 including creating 1,000 SARA units per year,  
12 including 20 million in preservation of HUD-202  
13 housing in the budget, adding 60 million for  
14 congregate meals rate increase, and the 27 million  
15 for home-delivered meals weekend program. Older  
16 adults must be included in the equation when we talk  
17 about making New York City an affordable place to  
18 live. Thank you.

19 HEW ROSE EVANS: Hello. And thank you for  
20 the opportunity to speak today. My name is Hew Rose  
21 Evans, and I'm speaking on behalf of the American  
LGBTQ Museum in support of its FY27 City Council  
discretionary funding request. The Museum provides  
educational and public programming, exploring the  
achievements and lived experiences of LGBT people in

1 all five boroughs of New York City. Here at the  
2 Museum, we see LGBTQ elders as the very heart of our  
3 community. They act as the true protectors of queer  
4 history, and we are ultimately responsible to them  
5 for protecting and stewarding their stories for  
6 future generations. We recognize that as a brand-new  
7 organization, we need to make increased investments  
8 in our aging communities to gain their trust and  
9 build affinity for our museum. This year, the  
10 American LGBTQ Museum is requesting 250,000 dollars  
11 in New York City Council discretionary funding. We  
12 recognize this request is more than the Museum has  
13 sought before, but it represents the scale of our  
14 expanding scope of services, especially to aging  
15 individuals. In March 2025, we launched the Queer  
16 Legacies Project in partnership with SAGE USA and the  
17 Feminist Institute, hosting a series of four  
18 archiving and oral history workshops at SAGE's E.D.  
19 Windsor Center in Chelsea. Provided at no cost, these  
20 workshops teach LGBTQ elders how to archive their  
21 personal photos, articles, recordings, and  
achievements for public memory. The program was an  
incredible success, welcoming over 125 registrants.  
And this month, we're proud to say that we're

1 successfully continuing the project, having launched  
2 our first session of Queer Legacies Project at SAGE  
3 Center Harlem yesterday. In FY27, we will bring the  
4 project to SAGE Center Bronx in November 2026 and to  
5 communities in Brooklyn and Queens in 2027. This  
6 project is just one of more than 50 public programs  
7 we produce annually, and these services are essential  
8 to building trust and familiarity with our Museum.  
9 But we need your help to maintain the momentum of the  
10 Museum's growth. We're humbly asking Committee  
11 Members to advocate for the Museum to your fellow  
12 Colleagues, helping (TIMER CHIME) us to increase our  
13 LGBTQ community services funding to 250,000 in FY27.  
14 Together, we can build a museum that honors the  
15 memories of all LGBTQ elders. Thank you for your  
16 time.

15 ELIZABETH LEE: Thank you for the  
16 opportunity to testify today. My name is Elizabeth  
17 Lee, Senior Director at Vision Services for the Blind  
18 and Visually Impaired, a non-profit that has served  
19 New Yorkers with vision loss for nearly 100 years.  
20 Last year alone, Vision supported over 8,000 New  
21 Yorkers with more than 2,000 adults age 16 and older.  
Our mission is to help visually impaired and blind

1 individuals live independently and remain active in  
2 their communities. Vision loss is a disability  
3 multiplier. Older adults with vision loss face  
4 significantly higher risk of socialization,  
5 depression, cognitive decline, falls,  
6 hospitalization, loss of independence. Many older  
7 adult centers and community programs are not designed  
8 to accommodate the needs of participants who are  
9 blind and visually impaired. In New York City alone,  
10 an estimated 84,000 older adults over the age of 65  
11 are living with blindness and with many more  
12 experiencing significant vision loss. Along with New  
13 York City Aging, we have been able to provide  
14 services for older adults who are blind and visually  
15 impaired with our Older Adult Center in Chelsea and  
16 our Caregiver Support Group, but we serve all through  
17 the five boroughs because they're a unique specialty.  
18 Vision provides accessible health and wellness  
19 programming, assistive technology, support groups,  
20 meals, and community-based and in-home services.  
21 However, significant gaps remain. When you combine  
age, vision loss, and limited income, isolation  
health risks increase dramatically. With early  
identification and access to vision rehab services,

2 many older adults can maintain independence and  
3 safely age in place. So, as the City and Council  
4 considers the FY27 budget, we respectfully urge  
5 investment in the following priorities.

6 First, dedicated funding for vision rehab  
7 services within aging programs, including accessible  
8 training that allows older adults to safely navigate  
9 their homes and communities.

10 Second, improve accessible transportation  
11 options.

12 Third, integration of vision screening  
13 and vision rehab referrals within older adult  
14 centers, NORCs, and case management systems so that  
15 we can identify vision loss early and it can be  
16 addressed.

17 Fourth, continue investment in adaptive  
18 technology access and teaching older adults to adapt  
19 with (TIMER CHIME) technology.

20 And lastly, intergenerational programming  
21 as well.

22 So, thank you again for allowing me to  
23 testify.

24 KEVIN KIPROVSKI: Hello, everybody. My  
25 name's Kevin Kiproviski, Director of Public Policy at

2 Live On New York. I'm going to skip some of the intro  
3 because I feel like a lot of that was covered really  
4 well by every organization that's been here and I'll  
5 go into some of the needs. So, the first need is  
6 actually part of our 2.3-billion-dollar Age Strong  
7 New York City campaign. We're not asking for all that  
8 this year. It's a five-year campaign. We're just  
9 trying to get to it. We've estimated anywhere from  
10 500 million to 1 billion dollars to get all of the  
11 centers in the city up to a state of good repair.  
12 Last year, the 5-million-dollar investment was the  
13 first major investment in infrastructure in over a  
14 decade. It has changed the way people are looking at  
15 their centers, so we're so grateful for that. In  
16 repairs less than 100,000 dollars, we currently have  
17 16-million-dollar's worth of ready-to-go projects. So  
18 if you want to give us 16 million dollars, I don't  
19 think we'd say no to that. So, 5 million dollars is  
20 great, 10 million is great, but whatever you guys are  
21 going to give us, it's going to change everything.  
But we do think that with a need so high, with 5  
million dollars, it would take 100 years to get  
there. So, we really want to try to push the Mayor as

2 well to try to put money into that to get the system  
3 going.

4           Next, 90 million dollars for nutritional  
5 support broken down into 60 million for congregate  
6 meals at OAC, and we added it to 30 million because  
7 there was actually an increase in how much each meal  
8 costs from 15 dollars to 16 dollars so, we're still  
9 looking into that number, but the number that we have  
10 now would be 30 million to fully fund Council Member  
11 Lee's seven-day-a-week bill. As much money as we can  
12 get for that, it would be great. We're also pushing  
13 with UNH for 10 million dollars for a NORC in every  
14 neighborhood. We've seen that there are neighborhoods  
15 that don't have senior centers. NORCs are quicker to  
16 get up and running. We still need the centers, but  
17 it's a way to make sure people are getting services,  
18 and 10 million dollars is not a big lift for the City  
19 government. We think it's very reasonable and very  
20 possible to get that funding.

21           And the last one is much deeper  
collaboration between NYC Aging and HPD. We need to  
be getting more people on SCRIE. 47 percent of people  
is not a good enough number. We've spoken to DOF,  
we've spoken to HPD. There's a lot of really creative

2 ways where we don't have to spend an extra dollar and  
3 we can double that number. There's an MOU between the  
4 State and the City that prevents the City from using  
5 certain data to (TIMER CHIME) get people to apply in  
6 a targeted way. There's lots of things that are just  
7 matters of policy that we can fix. But honestly, when  
8 it comes to housing, we're asking for a full billion  
9 dollars to get SARA developed. 200 million of that is  
10 to improve SCRIE and another 200 million is to fix  
11 HUD 202 buildings. So, we'd love to continue that  
12 conversation. We're also so grateful, Council Member  
13 Zhuang, that you're such a great advocate for this,  
14 and we're really excited to work with you on this  
15 moving forward.

16 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you, guys, for  
17 organizing the rally and thank you, guys, for waiting  
18 and letting the senior go first. Thank you.

19 And then we have next group, Mohammad  
20 Razvi and John Holt.

21 So only John, John Holt. Thank you.

JOHN HOLT: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair. I'm  
John Holt, I'm the Director of the Senior Law Project  
at Volunteers of Legal Service. For over 40 years,  
VOLs has partnered with community-based organizations

1 and the private bar to provide free legal services to  
2 New Yorkers who otherwise cannot afford or access  
3 representation. Our five core projects serve small  
4 business owners, individuals accessing benefits,  
5 immigrant young people, incarcerated mothers, and  
6 older adults in every borough. The VOLS Senior Law  
7 Project provides low-income older adults free legal  
8 services to plan for death and incapacity through the  
9 execution of life planning documents, including last  
10 wills and testaments, powers of attorney, living  
11 wills, and healthcare proxies. For our clients, these  
12 documents are vital tools to help ensure that their  
13 wishes and preferences are honored and, without them,  
14 many would find themselves unable to safely remain in  
15 their communities, forcing them into costly  
16 institutionalization or overly restrictive protective  
17 arrangements like Article 81 guardianship. Every day,  
18 we see barriers that lead potential clients to miss  
19 the window of opportunity where advanced planning can  
20 be a viable preventative tool. To combat this, the  
21 Senior Law Project partners with older adult centers  
and other community-based organizations all over the  
city to provide older adults and the professionals  
who work with them education on the importance of

2 advanced planning and clear direction on how to  
3 timely reach our program. In the present moment, many  
4 New Yorkers are afraid to present for services due to  
5 the policies of the federal government, and we need  
6 to continue to seek ways of building trust and  
7 community among the fastest growing demographic of  
8 older adults in our city, immigrants. We also see  
9 that even when older adults do access systems,  
10 there's not always clear identification of their  
11 interconnected needs, and responses are often siloed  
12 to address the presenting symptoms and not the root  
13 causes of the problem. The Senior Law Project  
14 respectively calls on the Council to continue to  
15 support and prioritize programs that reach aging New  
16 Yorkers in their homes and communities to provide  
17 holistic services that are responsive to their  
18 diverse financial, medical, social, legal, cultural,  
19 and linguistic needs and to ensure that the legal  
20 service organizations like VOLS have the resources  
21 they need to continue to provide assistance that  
promotes autonomous decision-making and closes the  
justice gap for older adults. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you so much for  
waiting. Thank you.

2 How many case you guys provide every  
3 year?

4 JOHN HOLT: So, we measure our cases by  
5 individual documents in the Senior Law Project. Last  
6 Fiscal Year, we executed over 1,000 legal documents  
7 for older adults and there were several hundred  
8 individual unique clients that we served.

9 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

10 We now move to the virtual testimony.  
11 Please wait for your name to be called to testify and  
12 please select unmute when you're prompted.

13 First, Mamerta Reyes.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 MAMERTA REYES: Hello, members of the  
16 Committee on Aging. My name is Mamerta Reyes. I am  
17 very active member and volunteer at the Older Adults  
18 Center at Sunset Community Service. I go to the  
19 center for the atmosphere. I meet my friends, the  
20 staff are friendly, and if I need anything or have a  
21 problem, they are there to help me. It is my second  
home. What would I do in my apartment all alone? They  
help me a lot to get SNAP, SCRIE, and my medical  
insurance. I even get help to get all pantry food. I  
am grateful for having my Sunnyside Community Center.

2 I live in Jackson Heights, but travel because that's  
3 how much I need it. Thank you for the opportunity to  
4 share my concerns of the need of older adults in New  
York City.

5 I first want to ask for support of older  
6 adult centers for all their services, but especially  
7 for more money for food and all expenses related for  
8 meals. Seven years and counting and they don't get an  
9 increase. How expensive is the food now? We need  
10 money to keep the center running with good food. The  
11 center prepares fresh food every day, letting me  
12 enjoy my day with exercise, games, dancing, and  
13 singing, and knowing new knowledge about anything and  
14 keeping me busy by accepting me as a volunteer. I  
15 feel great when I help. I also love when we can go to  
16 the shows, trips, supermarkets, and just for walks  
sometimes. This is why you need to give more money to  
all older adult centers so (TIMER CHIME) that others  
like me can live --

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
18 has expired.

19 MAMERTA REYES: I am not --

20 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: You are muted. Let  
21 her finish.

2 MAMERTA REYES: I'm so sorry. She's been  
3 muted.

4 It's unmuted now.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: Oh, they didn't hear you.  
6 They didn't hear you.

7 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Only the last part  
8 did not hear.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: How did it get muted? Okay,  
10 can she start over again? I'm so sorry.

11 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: You only need to  
12 start the last few sentence. The rest is fine.

13 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay.

14 MAMERTA REYES: I also love when we go to  
15 shows, trips, supermarkets, and just for walks  
16 sometimes. It is being together and not alone that  
17 matters most. This is why you need to give more money  
18 to all older adult center so that others like me can  
19 live a healthy and dignified life. It even helps my  
20 family because they have peace of mind that I'm not  
21 alone in my apartment and that I can enjoy my day and  
get help at any time. Where else can I get this? You  
must help us keep our center open and we need more  
money, please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you.

2 Next one, we have Emily Rios.

3 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

4 EMILY RIOS: Thank you, Chair, Susan  
5 Zhuang and Members of the New York City Council  
6 Committee on Aging for giving us this opportunity to  
7 submit testimony. I'm Emily Rios, the Managing  
8 Director of Community Services at Asian Americans for  
9 Equality, also known as AAFE. AAFE is a 52-year-old  
10 organization which advances racial, social, and  
11 economic justice for all, regardless of background.  
12 We're guided by our experiences as Asian Americans  
13 and our commitment to civil rights. Asian seniors are  
14 New York City's fastest growing yet poorest elderly  
15 population with 42 percent living in or near poverty,  
16 facing intense language barriers and social  
17 isolation. Reports from the Asian American Federation  
18 highlight that almost 67 percent of low-income Asian  
19 seniors are immigrants with many struggling to access  
20 services. 25 percent of Asian seniors live in  
21 poverty, and high percentages have a limited English  
proficiency, a combination that makes accessing  
services difficult and leads to greater isolation.  
Now, on average, every year, AAFE serves about 14,000  
community members. We operate out of three locations.

2 And based on our daily interactions, we observe some  
3 key needs that I would like to share with you. And we  
4 ask that this Committee and the City Council to  
5 support our elderly population based on our  
6 recommendations. New York is grappling with a severe  
7 shortage of affordable housing, and seniors who live  
8 on fixed incomes cannot compete in this competitive  
9 housing market. Many of our clients must turn to  
10 vouchers or resort to living in unsafe and  
11 overcrowded housing. One question we consistently get  
12 is the availability of affordable senior housing in  
13 the neighborhood. In recent history, our city has  
14 built --

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time  
16 has expired.

17 EMILY RIOS: Can I continue?

18 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Yes. Please wrap up  
19 in 15 seconds. Thank you.

20 EMILY RIOS: Okay. So, senior housing. The  
21 other thing I want to bring up is how vulnerable the  
elderly community is with financial exploitation. We  
see that there are a lot of helping organizations  
that are charging our seniors for application support  
or fake legal assistance, and I wanted to bring that

2 to your attention because that is such a vulnerable  
3 population to be exploited and scammed.

4 And I think the final thing is the  
5 conditions of many older adults who are living in  
6 substandard apartments that are exposed to fire and  
7 health hazards. And the lack of information that  
8 seniors have on their tenant rights. Many of the  
9 seniors that we work with are often afraid to ask for  
10 repairs because they're worried their landlord is  
11 going to -- well, either their landlord uses  
12 intimidating tactics or that their landlord is going  
13 to penalize them in some way. I know I'm conscious of  
14 time and I really appreciate this opportunity, but I  
15 really wanted to flag some of those things that are  
16 reoccurring cases that we're seeing in our office.

17 CHAIRPERSON ZHUANG: Thank you. Thank you.

18 Thank you to everyone who have testified.

19 If there's anyone present in the Zoom or  
20 in the room that has not had the opportunity to  
21 testify, please raise your hand.

Seeing no one else, I would like to note  
that the written testimony, which will be reviewed in  
full by Committee Staff, may be submitted to the  
record up to 72 hours after the closing of this

1 COMMITTEE ON AGING

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2 hearing by emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

3 [GAVEL] Adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing

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transcript is a true and accurate record of the

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proceedings. We further certify that there is no

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relation to any of the parties to this action by blood

11

or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome

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of this matter.

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Date March 14, 2026

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