

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

ASK

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SENIOR

CENTERS AND FOOD

INSECURITY

Jointly with the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL

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Crystal Hudson, Chairperson

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3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Good morning and
4 welcome to today's hybrid New York City Council
5 hearing for the Committee's on Aging jointly with
6 Senior Centers. To minimize disruptions please place
7 all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. If
8 you'd like to submit testimonies, please send via an
9 email to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for
10 your cooperation. Chairs we are ready to begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Good morning and welcome to
12 the joint hearing on Food Insecurity and Older Adult
13 Centers. I am Darlene Mealy, Chair of the
14 Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurities.
15 I want to thank the Chair of Aging Committee
16 Councilmember Crystal Hudson for joining me today to
17 discuss this important topic. The COVID-19 pandemic
18 took a spotlight to the issue of hunger in the older
19 adult community, and record inflation has only
20 worsened this crisis. Currently at least one in
21 eight older New Yorkers do not know where their next
22 meal will come from. According to a study published
23 by United Neighborhood Houses, older adults of color
24 are five to six times more likely than their white
25 counterparts to experience food insecurity. Older
adults faced acute isolation and trauma even before

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2 the pandemic hit, and now have hunger and rising food
3 costs as added burdens. If we do not address the
4 crisis level problem of food insecurity in our city,
5 the negative physical and mental health outcome that
6 older adults now face will only get progressively
7 worse. That will have a pronounced set of unintended
8 negative consequences for our city. Statistics show
9 that food insecure older adults are more likely to
10 suffer from depression asthma, diabetes, and
11 congestive heart failure, adding to other already
12 existing health challenges that they face. That is
13 why I have called on the mayor and this
14 administration to do more to address these issues, by
15 putting more money into the already stressed and
16 strain food pantries and soup kitchens in the city
17 that serve our older adults. This means a long-term
18 commitment and investment in programs that feed the
19 most vulnerable New Yorkers. We must use all of the
20 tools at our disposal to connect older New Yorkers to
21 food assistance they need in the communities where
22 they live through conjugate and grab and go meals at
23 older adult centers, home-delivered meals, SNAP, and
24 our city's network of food pantries and soup
25 kitchens. And with the ministrations strong support,

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2 we can reach our goal of ending food insecurity for
3 our older adults.

4 I want to thank the administration, advocates,
5 and members of the public who have joined us today.

6 I will also like to thank my staff and the
7 Subcommittee staff. I would like to thank our
8 Commissioner for being here today and looking forward
9 to her testimony.

10 And I will now turn it over to our Chair, Crystal
11 Hudson of Aging.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
13 Councilmember Mealy. Good morning. I'm
14 Councilmember Crystal Hudson, Chair of the Committee
15 on Aging. And thank you again, Chair Mealy, for
16 calling this very important oversight hearing on Food
17 Insecurity and Older Adult Centers. As Chair Mealy
18 acknowledged, the pandemic hit New York City hard,
19 and between uncertainty and the fear of infection,
20 coupled with stay at home orders, our most vulnerable
21 New Yorkers suddenly found themselves even more
22 susceptible. Faced with this unprecedented crisis,
23 the government, community-based organizations, and
24 service providers pivoted operations in an effort to
25 respond to the new and altered needs of New Yorkers,

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2 and older New Yorkers in particular. This included
3 the temporary closure of the city's 300-plus older
4 adult centers, which not only provide older New
5 Yorkers with hot meals, programming, and social
6 services but also a sense of community. Well, DFTA
7 has long offered home-delivered meals to New Yorkers,
8 Older Adult Centers began offering grab-and-go meals,
9 virtual programming and providing services over the
10 phone. Neighbors and other community members also
11 banded together to fill gaps.

12 During that time I founded Greater Prospect
13 Heights Mutual Aid, a neighborhood network that for
14 over two years provided material, emotional, and
15 informational support to meet the needs of neighbors
16 experiencing food insecurity and economic
17 instability, especially for our older neighbors in
18 Prospect Heights, Brooklyn and surrounding
19 communities. Through that organization, I saw how
20 many of the folks to whom we provided services,
21 including older adults, remained fearful, even as the
22 height of the pandemic waned, of going to congregate
23 settings due to fear of the virus, and some of those
24 individuals were undocumented and sensitive to any
25 encounters with government. So I'm acutely aware of

1 the importance of meeting older adults where they
2 are.
3

4 Now that older adult centers have reopened and
5 are largely reverting back to in-person services and
6 programming, there remain older New Yorkers who would
7 continue to benefit from services like grab-and-go
8 meals, which are no longer available at every OAC.

9 From available data, we know that persistently
10 high rates of food insecurity and hunger, disparities
11 and diet related diseases, and low wages and unsafe
12 working conditions for food workers does
13 disproportionately harm to black Latinx communities,
14 immigrants, low income populations, LGBTQIA+
15 individuals and older adults.

16 We also know there are large disparities in
17 reporting food insecurity by borough, with rates in
18 the Bronx and Brooklyn significantly higher than the
19 city average. As such, it would benefit the city to
20 aggregate this data and use an intersectional lens to
21 identify disproportionately impacted communities to
22 which services can be targeted.

23 At this hearing, I'm looking forward to learning
24 about how the city is identifying and meeting the
25 nutritional and other needs of older New Yorkers.

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2 I'm also interested in understanding the decision to
3 end certain pandemic-era services that are still in
4 demand by some, especially when the number of older
5 adults living in New York City is projected to grow
6 over 40% by 2040. As a city, we must ensure that we
7 have plans and systems in place to serve the ever-
8 aging population and its plurality of needs.

9 Thank you to the advocates and members of the
10 public who are joining us today, and thank you to
11 Commissioner Cortés-Vázquez and other representatives
12 from the administration for joining us. I'd also
13 like to thank my staff Casey Addison and Andrew
14 Wright, and the Aging Committee staff Christopher
15 Pepe, Chloe Rivera, and Daniel Crew. I'd also like
16 to acknowledge Councilmember Linda Lee... and I
17 thought I saw Barron, but okay.

18 I'll now turn it over to Committee Counsel Chris
19 Pepe who will administer the oath to the
20 administration. Thank you.

21 COUNSEL: Morning. I will now administer the
22 oath. Commissioner, please raise your right hand.
23 Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and
24 nothing but the truth and to respond honestly to
25 Councilmember questions.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I do.

3 COUNSEL: Thank you, Commissioner, you may
4 proceed.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: First of all, I
6 want to thank Councilmember and Chair Hudson for
7 acknowledging that they're called Older Adult
8 Centers. So... So one of the things that... Yeah,
9 got you there, Councilmember Mealy. We'll change
10 that.

11 First of all, Good morning, Chair Hudson and
12 Chair Mealy, and members of the aging Committee and
13 the Subcommittee on Senior... formerly called Senior
14 Centers and Food Insecurity... soon to be called
15 Older Adult Clubs and Food Insecurity. As you just
16 said, I am Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez of the New York
17 City Department for the Aging, which we are now
18 calling NYC Aging.

19 I am... So every opportunity to come back ages,
20 and we do not miss any opportunity. I'm pleased to
21 be able to testify before you today on a topic which
22 is so fundamental to the work that we do at NYC
23 Aging, which is combating food insecurity among older
24 adult populations in New York. In fact, it was the
25 bedrock of the Older Americans Act when the

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3 Department for the Aging was first established many
4 years ago. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
5 on this matter, and to... and I'm looking forward to
6 giving you an overview of some of the important work
7 that NYC Aging does to connect older adults to food
8 service, uh... food resources and to combat hunger in
9 this vulnerable population.

10 As you know, and you both stated COVID 19
11 pandemic disproportionately affected older adults and
12 a variety of ways from health outcomes -- many of
13 which we still do not know what the long term
14 outcomes are -- to connectivity issues, social
15 isolation, and even safely accessing food a basic
16 need for life. Older Adults felt the impact of this
17 global pandemic deeply.

18 At NYC Aging we are eager to reacclimate older
19 adults to a life where we live and adapt to this new
20 reality because I don't think that will ever go back
21 to life as we knew it. Because of that, this fall,
22 we were excited to launch a Join Us campaign, which
23 encourages older adults to return to their local
24 older adult centers, the OACs. They were connected
25 to programs and activity including congregate meals.
This is really important, and I want to give a shout

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1 out to cheer Hudson for her recent tweet about that
2 campaign in the subway. In recent weeks, the OACs,
3 as a call category to HA, which is a call category to
4 Aging Connect, NYC aging's in-house contact center
5 (you all know that we have a very specialized
6 information... expanded information referral center)
7 has increased since the start of the campaign, and we
8 are hopeful this is a sign of increased attendance in
9 our centers.
10

11 Regarding infant food insecurity in older adults,
12 New York City Aging focuses on two main programs to
13 meet the various needs of clients in New York.

14 First, older adults can access congregate meals
15 within those OACs, and depending on that provider's
16 contract, they can either provide a breakfast or a
17 lunch, and sometimes a dinner at a particular center.

18 Secondly, older adults who cannot attend an Older
19 Adult Club or who are unable to shop for themselves
20 may be entitled to receive home-delivered meals
21 through our HDM program.

22 Older adults have access to healthy nutritious
23 meals at all Older Adult Centers across the city.
24 While the last three years have been difficult for
25 providing congregate meals to older adults in those

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2 centers, we are happy to see attendance increasing
3 since our centers reopened in June of 2021. As
4 always, meal service is a core focus of the program
5 and the work that they do.

6 Since the reopening of OACs, NYC programs have
7 served nearly 6 million meals to older adults between
8 the congregate meals and the grab-and-go... the
9 temporary grab-and-go meals. Meals provided at OACs
10 are developed to be nutritious and culturally
11 appropriate. Centers and neighborhoods which speak
12 languages other than English or have a predominant
13 cultural need have meals tailored to those
14 individuals who attend those sites, and I'm pleased
15 to say that we also have a pure vegetarian meal
16 option at our centers. This may include meals which
17 are culturally Spanish, Puertorriqueño, Caribbean,
18 Asian, and other appropriate meals. We are pleased
19 to see steady increases in the number of meals being
20 served and the correlation between congregate meals
21 and older adults returning to their Older Adult
22 Clubs.

23 We have seen an average of about 80% in up-
24 attendance at the OACs at this time for all
25 activities. Providing meals to homebound older

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2 adults helps to ensure that their nutritional needs
3 are met and promotes overall health and ability to
4 live independently in the communities that they
5 helped build.

6 Through the network of 14 dedicated home-
7 delivered meals providers in the most recent full
8 fiscal year 2022 New York City aging delivered more
9 than 4 million meals to over 26,000 homebound older
10 adults enrolled in this program. In order to qualify
11 for this program, older adults must meet specific
12 criteria, such as (one) being unable to attend to
13 their daily life activities, are either ill or frail,
14 or lacked the ability to prepare food for themselves.
15 HDMs function differently than what older adults who
16 attend Older Adult Clubs will see in the congregate
17 services. The HDM program at NYC Aging is connected
18 to services provided by the case management agencies
19 who perform in-depth assessments of a person's
20 social, psychological, cognitive and physical
21 wellbeing to determine their needs. This is a key
22 part of the community care model, and allows older
23 adults to successfully age in place within the
24 communities that they helped built.

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3 New York City Aging continues to work to expand
4 choices and options that older adults have and who
5 are in the HDM program, and they can choose the kinds
6 of meals that they would prefer, much like OACs older
7 adults who have culturally specific needs -- such as
8 kosher, halal, or cultural palates -- receive
9 appropriate meals tailored to those requirements.
10 Meals are nutritious and developed to provide an
11 older adults with healthy options when they cannot
12 leave home or are unable to afford food on their own.

13 While dietary restrictions such as vegan and
14 plant-based options are not part of the HDM program,
15 individuals who request those types of meals are
16 referred to partner organizations who do provide
17 those meals with those requirements in mind.

18 As you may remember, at the start of the pandemic
19 NYC Aging quickly transitioned our congregate meal
20 operations to ensure that center members continue to
21 have access to daily meals. We had to do that in
22 less than one week's time. Meal service operations
23 included the grab-and-go model, which proved to be
24 successful in an emergency basis. But as the city
25 locked down, we needed to emerge into another model.

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3 And we eventually merged into the city's broader food
4 and security initiative called get food NYC.

5 While the grab-and-go program has ended as a
6 citywide endeavor, some OACs have chosen to formally
7 include this as part of their programs to serve the
8 needs of the clients who are have temporary
9 emergencies, and so that they can get this need met.

10 For those clients who received grab-and-go meals and
11 are now in need of other arrangements. They had been
12 offered meal services through NYC Aging programs.

13 And as such returned to the OACs and the HDM
14 programs.

15 Well grab-and-go is a viable emergency option it
16 should not be a default provision, as it does not
17 support the key benefit and purpose of congregate
18 settings, which is to combat social isolation.

19 Additionally, NYC Aging has launched a successful
20 8-months, 60-plus recovery meal service to help older
21 adults with this transition away from the pandemic
22 responses to food insecurity. At the end of this
23 transitional service, all participating older adults,
24 either self-attested to no longer needing meal
25 service, or have identified appropriate means of
getting food either by transitioning back to

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2 shopping, or attending an OAC, or qualifying for
3 home-delivered meals. Months after the recovery meal
4 service ended, we have not stopped our efforts to
5 ensure vulnerable older adults receive adequate food.

6 New York City Aging has identified older adults
7 who participated in the recovery meals program, but
8 have not yet participated in either of the OACs or
9 within the HDM program. In November of this year,
10 New York City Aging distributed postcards to these
11 adults, which was supplemented by outreach calls to
12 encourage those older adults to attend an OAC, and to
13 enjoy congregate meal services. These postcards were
14 delivered in an appropriate language including
15 English, Spanish, Russian, traditional and simplified
16 Chinese Mandarin, Arabic, Polish, and Bengali. We
17 are hopeful that these efforts will continue to
18 connect even more eligible older New Yorkers to the
19 appropriate read of food resources that they need,
20 and to encourage them to come to OACs.

21 We know that access to meals is a fundamental
22 component of not just stability and health but also
23 independence and aging in place. Ensuring older
24 adults have access to meals is the foundational work
25 of New York City Aging. We are happy to continue and

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3 expand the core component of our network of services.

4 I am proud of the work that NYC Aging and our program

5 of nonprofit providers have done, especially during

6 these challenging and ever-changing times. And

7 because we know that food insecurity is such a great

8 issue, we continue to look at ways of addressing food

9 insecurity beyond the ways that we do now. We've

10 been looking at commissary kitchens and ways of

11 expanding services in that manner, and also expanding

12 the opportunity of choice that older adults have with

13 those meals.

14 Furthermore, these programs which combat food and

15 security reinforce the key tenets of the Community

16 Care Plan, which much like OAC congregate meals and

17 HDM meals, prevent institutional admissions, and keep

18 older New Yorkers where they belong: in their

19 communities.

20 I value the partnership that we have with our

21 sister agencies, and that now we have a cabinet for

22 all aging New Yorkers, which was established by Mayor

23 Eric Adams to combat many issues, but food insecurity

24 is one of those issues that we are doing and have

25 successfully integrated into other programs which

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2 provide daily meals, and for that I thank you and I'm
3 open to your questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: All right, thank you for that
5 testimony. I want to just go let you know that Chi
6 Ossé just joined us via Zoom.

7 Okay, my... you said, um... I wanted to ask:

8 According to the Mayor's Office of Food Policy,

9 approximately 12.5%... 1.4 million of New Yorkers are

10 food insecure. The rate of food insecurity was above

11 the city's average in the Bronx with 16.4%, Brooklyn

12 with 13.5%, and in Manhattan were 12.7%, and 9.7%

13 Queens residents, and 8.7% Staten Island residents.

14 How does the city account for the differences by

15 borough do you think?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: How does the city

17 account for the differences in those boroughs?

18 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Yes, with food insecurity.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I think that there

20 are a variety of factors that feed into that.

21 There's poverty levels, there's... there's food

22 deserts, and there's a variety of factors that factor

23 into the distinctions between the levels of food

24 security, in those.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Are we counting... Do we have
3 a database to see what rate of food, among older
4 adults by boroughs?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Please say that
6 again.

7 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: What is the rate of food
8 insecurity among older adults by borough?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We monitor food
10 insecurity for older adults by borough, by community
11 district. That is how we assemble all of our data.
12 And what I can assure you is that when we issued
13 the... both the RFP for Older Adult Clubs, as well as
14 the RFP for home-delivered meals, that was exactly
15 what we looked at. We looked at where was the
16 greatest need, where were the community... the TRIE
17 communities, what we call the racial communities had
18 traditional inequities in those bor... in those
19 communities. And so we used that as a basis for
20 either expansion or shifting services. So it's
21 something that we constantly monitor. And each
22 borough...

23 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: That's what I'm asking. How
24 do you monitor that? Like Staten Island has only
25 8.7%. Is that due to their income? Or the seniors

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2 do not go to the senior centers? Or do they eat at
3 home? That's why it's very low? I know the...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I think there are a
5 variety of factors that surface into food insecurity,
6 and you've mentioned some of them. It's one of the
7 resources available. But income and the social
8 determinants are one of the greatest factors that...
9 that feed into food insecurity. So the borough rate
10 will distinguish by those other social factors in
11 those communities.

12 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I'm sorry, we just want to
13 acknowledge Councilmember Marte is here with us also.

14 Thank you for that, but we talked about low food
15 security. Do we have the minimum age that is
16 included in these rates? Like if they are 75... age
17 75-plus, or 62 to 65?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No, we do not look
19 at food and security by age distinctions. We look at
20 service needs by age distinctions. So it's not just
21 food and security. We would look at, you know, a
22 population and see what services are available to
23 them, and where there are gaps, and what's needed.
24 But we don't look at food insecurity as... as a
25 factor for age discri... distinctions. And we do

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2 track the age in our home-delivered meals programs,
3 so that we could... we know, okay, how many of them
4 fall into whatever categories.

5 COUNCILMEMBER MEALY: So you do track it. How
6 does this rate compare to the rate pre-pandemic?
7 What is the current rate of food insecurity now, to
8 when it was pre-pandemic.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I do not have a
10 rate of food insecurity for older adults overall for
11 the entire city. We can say that there are 1.4
12 million people who food insecure in this city, as you
13 have said. There are many factors that feed into
14 food insecurity. We know at the Department for the
15 Aging, we serve 4 million meals in congregate
16 settings and 6 million meals in home-delivered meals.
17 What we, what we don't have is the balance of food
18 insecurity in the 1.6 million older adults. But we
19 do know, and what we discovered during the pandemic,
20 was there are about another 100,000 people who self-
21 identified as food insecure, and I... and then they
22 transitioned off the program. And we had a number of
23 about 22,000 in the Recovery Meal Program, which we
24 surveyed to find out what their food insecurity needs
25 were, and how could those be met. And people self-

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2 identified: You know, either they could go back to
3 home-delivered meals... OAC, or they could go to a
4 home-delivered meals program. But we don't have a
5 number of the 1.6 million older New Yorkers, what of
6 those who are food insecure. Because so many factors
7 feed into food insecurity: accessibility, income,
8 location, physical ability.

9 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: But are we saying that income
10 doesn't matter? Because right now, what steps does
11 DFTA take to identify older adults experiencing food
12 insecurity? What is the relationship between income
13 and access to nutritious food for our older adults?
14 That is: How much of one's income does an older
15 adult spend on food and various income levels in
16 order to be in a program like this with food
17 insecurity?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So I'm going to try
19 to parse out parts of that question, alright?

20 The portion of your income that determines
21 whether you have food insecure or not is not data
22 that I have. We can look at data and see if we can
23 get back to you with some of that. What I can say to
24 you is: We look at by community district poverty
25 levels, income levels, accessibility to food

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2 resources to determine where are the needs? Where
3 are the communities that have the greatest need? And
4 how could we respond to those needs?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Just a quick follow up
6 question to that. So does the city know the average
7 distance a typical older New Yorker lives from free
8 or affordable meals? So for example, we know that
9 every New Yorker lives within 30 minutes of a public
10 library. Do we have a sense of...?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah, that was...
12 Thank you for that question. We looked at... When
13 we issued the RFP, we looked at -- not for all
14 resources, but I'm going to focus it on OACs which is
15 what we have control over, right? -- we looked at
16 that a person should not have more than 10 to 15
17 blocks to be walking to an Older Adult Club. Or can
18 we provide transportation services to get them?
19 Which is one of the cases in Staten Island and
20 certain parts of Queens.

21 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you for that question.
22 How does DFTA work to address the potential...
23 potential stigma and shame around the food
24 insecurity? How do you make it comfortable for our
25

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2 seniors to come to the senior centers? What outreach
3 do you do?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Right. Those are
5 two different questions. We do a lot of outreach.
6 Our local network does a lot of outreach in the
7 community, because as I said, we are serving an
8 average of about 19,000 people at the Older Adult
9 Clubs right now. And we would love that to be up to
10 the pre-pandemic levels. And uh... what...

11 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: That's a question that I
12 asked the last hearing. So what kind of
13 advertisement... or who are you advertising with in
14 regards to getting out seniors back. Instead, I
15 heard you say the postcards. Other than postcards,
16 what are the way are you reaching out? Do you have a
17 budget for this?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: The answer to the
19 last one is no. There's no budget. We have to use
20 it from within our existing budget.

21 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Really?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. The... We
23 have... There's not a specific advertising budget.
24 We have with our partner agencies... They conduct a
25 variety of outreach. Some of those are calls. Some

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2 of those special events. Some of those flyers. Some
3 of that is poster boards. We joined... We had an
4 extensive multimedia campaign called Join Us that we
5 did on subways, radio, television, postcards, social
6 media, just to keep getting the word out there that
7 these Older Adult Clubs are there and available for
8 older New Yorkers.

9 As for the stigma and the shame, everyone and
10 anyone can come into an Older Adult Club. We do not
11 ask you your income, or any of those kinds of
12 questions you can come in and you can avail yourself
13 of a nutritious meal, regardless of income and
14 regardless of standing.

15 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, with your home-
16 delivered meals and case management: Last year, with
17 the end of the DFTA recovery meals, Emergency Food
18 Program, rampant of the get food program set up
19 during the pandemic, the city allocated funding for
20 home-delivered meals, and case management programs.
21 How many older adults received meals through that
22 recovery program?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: The recovery
24 program, Get Food, older adults, I think at one point
25 the number was about 110,000. In addition to the 110

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3 additional... I'll get you the exact numbers of that
4 because I don't want to go on the record with an
5 erroneous number.

6 So it was the program... It was all of the older
7 adults that were part of the OACs, as well as the
8 individuals who raised their hand and said that they
9 were food insecure. I will give you that number.

10 When that program ended, we had a program for
11 older adults specifically called Recovery Meals.
12 That programs served over... I think was started out
13 with 22,000, and then at the end of that program,
14 there were 11,000 people. And of those individuals
15 we kept serving... surveying them to make sure that
16 they had means for food insecurity responses, that
17 was either... and many of them said that they could
18 resume shopping, resume their regular life. Some
19 went to Older Adult Clubs. Some were referred to
20 home-delivered meals and opted not to because they
21 didn't want to do the assessment, and may remember
22 many of these people would never involve with
23 government and so this was the first experience.

24 So we've transitioned 2218 clients were
25 identified that they were able to shop for groceries
and food for themselves, 398 clients would transition

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2 to OACs, 616 clients were able to get help from a
3 friend and family member or caregiver, 3800 were
4 referred to case management agencies for assessment,
5 1295 ultimately, were enrolled in the HDM program.
6 So that was a data-rich answer to your question.

7 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I know. They said they're
8 going to follow up with your administration. One
9 thing: When you become a senior at 62 now, right?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: 60.

11 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: 60? Well to get a pension.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: At 62, you are
13 eligible for... 62 marks for some programs. It all
14 depends. It depends on the on the program. You
15 know, for older... for senior employment, it's 55.
16 For MTA, it's 65. For reduced fares at MTA, for
17 Older Adult Clubs under Older Adult Services, under
18 the Department for the Aging, it's 60. So it really
19 depends.

20 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Yeah, because the home-
21 delivered meal is 60 years old. Is this age eligible
22 for other food assistance programs? Because at one
23 point, when a senior asked, it was 65. You had to be
24 65 and up in order to get in some senior programs.

25

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2 And when I saw a 60 years old, I just said I wanted
3 to ask you.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. No, that's a
5 perfect question. For New York City Aging services,
6 it's 60-plus, with the exception of the Senior
7 Employment Program, which is 55.

8 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you. I didn't know
9 that.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And that's because
11 of age biases in the workforce.

12 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Hmm. And which we have to
13 change. How can we change that? Okay. I'm going to
14 leave off for some other questions, maybe. I'm going
15 to turn it over to my colleague, Crystal Hudson, for
16 her questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Chair Mealy. So
18 what is the current rate of food insecurity among
19 older adults in New York City?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: You know, we tried
21 to assess the range of food and meal services through
22 our congregate meals and our home-delivered meals, as
23 well as through the Farmer Nutrition Program that we
24 have, and complete... and also by completing SNAP
25 applications. So we look and are looking at food

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2 pantries. We know that the TRIE neighborhoods
3 represent areas of the city where individuals both
4 need more social service and also have greater
5 difficulty accessing those services. For home-
6 delivered meals, we looked very carefully at TRIE
7 neighborhoods who represent the majority of our
8 clients. I believe that more than 50% of our clients
9 receiving home-delivered meals live in in TRIE
10 communities. So it's something that we're constantly
11 looking at. But I can't give you an actual rate. I
12 can tell you that 50.6% of the people receiving home-
13 delivered meals live in TRIE communities. And I can
14 give you a good number and a good guesstimate of the
15 Older Adult Clubs.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. And then.
17 So that minimum age, just to confirm, is 60.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then do you know... Do
20 you have a sense of how this rate compares to the
21 rate pre-pandemic?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Well...

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Like... and... yeah... just,

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I was going to say,
25 you know, not... not having a good handle on the rate

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2 to begin with. But all I can tell you is that, given
3 our experience with the pandemic, we have seen a
4 greater need, and you saw the numbers in home-
5 delivered meals increase considerably. We went from
6 19... and there's 26,000 people receiving home-
7 delivered meals now. So we've seen that there has
8 been an increase. But I don't have a rate that I can
9 give you specifically.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then does DFTA
11 have... or NYC Aging, excuse me. Does NYC Aging have
12 statistics that reflect changes in demand for food
13 assistance by older adults in the past year?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: All I can... the...
15 Say that again, because I don't know if I can...

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you have statistics that
17 reflect changes in demand for food assistance for
18 older adults in the past year? So I know you just
19 ran through...

20 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. The recovery
21 Meal Process

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: ...the Recovery Meals and
23 where people are now. But essentially, do you have
24 any specific statistics that reflect changes in
25 demand? So I wouldn't necessarily say that the

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2 numbers you rattled off earlier are reflective of
3 demands.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We know... we know
5 that there is an increased demand for home-delivered
6 meals. We are working on meeting what we believe pre
7 pandemic levels at Older Adult Clubs, which is the
8 Join Us campaign, and other activities to get those
9 programs fully operational and fully at... at maximum
10 service levels. So it's hard to determine the demand
11 for congregate meals when we see that the Older Adult
12 Clubs are still not at full participation. But it's
13 something that we're constantly monitoring.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so as... just as a
15 follow up, City Harvest, for example, says that
16 there's a 36% increase in demand from the pandemic.
17 So are we delivering or serving 36% more meals than
18 pre-pandemic?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No. No. We are
20 serving more home-delivered meals but not in... not
21 in Older Adult Clubs.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That is not to say
24 that that number does not reflect what the food
25 insecurity and the demand that might be out there.

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2 The... You know, the department for the Department
3 for the... New York City Aging (look at that, even I
4 do it)... New York City Aging, we serve a small
5 portion of the 1.6 million older adults. So it is
6 constantly trying to assess what are the needs of
7 that other population that we don't... we don't
8 serve.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Can you describe the
10 nutritional needs of older adults and how city-funded
11 meal programs meet those needs?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Well, the
13 nutritional needs for older adults... or the
14 nutritional requirements for older adults. I don't
15 know if it's needs because if I were to eat what I
16 needed rather than what's required, I would... well,
17 it's a different story.

18 But the nutritional requirements for older adults
19 are set by the FDA and the Department of Agriculture.
20 And then SOFA, the State Office For Aging, also has
21 some requirements that we have to meet. And we have
22 a corps of nutritionists who work very closely with
23 our Older Adult Clubs and our home-delivered meals
24 providers to make sure that those nutritional
25 standards are met.

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2 Not only do they look at nutritional standards,
3 they look at health and safety standards and the
4 conditions of those operations.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you for that.
6 Is there a home-delivered meal waitlist?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: There is now. This
8 is the first time that we've experienced home-
9 delivered meals waitlist. When we last reported to
10 you, I believe we said it was about 164. Now that
11 number is 61. But it's something that we're looking
12 at very, very closely.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So, it's gone down from 164
14 to...

15 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It's gone down.
16 It's gone down because program capacity has gone up.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So 60... what?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: 61.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. And what's
20 the waitlist for a full case management assessment?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Hold on a minute.
22 I have those answers for you. I have those. I read
23 those last night so I know I have them. Okay. We're
24 going to get back to you on those waitlist numbers
25 because...

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Alright? I will
4 give you... We will give you the waitlist numbers by
5 service, case management, home-delivered meals, Older
6 Adult Clubs, and I believe there's one more. Okay?

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you. Yes, you
8 have a question, Councilmember Lee?

9 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Hello, Commissioner. Good
10 morning.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: So quick question. I'm
13 sorry. I have a few questions. So as you mentioned,
14 I know the utilization rates are still not where they
15 were pre-pandemic with a lot of the OACs, and so I
16 was just wondering for... I know it technically --
17 correct me if I'm wrong -- but technically the grab-
18 and-go meals, technically, were not part of the new
19 RFP. But if certain OACs still prefer to do that,
20 especially because seniors... older adults still
21 don't feel completely safe coming in for congregate
22 meals, would that still be an option for a lot of the
23 older adult centers if they wanted to keep that?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So we did build
25 grab-and-go into the RFP.

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2 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay, so the new RFP. Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So some programs,
4 as I said in the testimony, some programs chose that
5 option to include it in their in their proposal, you
6 know, because you always have that Older Adult Club
7 that goes to the hospital and needs meals when they
8 come out for five or six days before they can come
9 back to the center. So that's... Right, so there's
10 always that opportunity. However, other people did
11 not opt for that.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Right? So if you
14 did not put that it's, you know, it's not part of
15 your program.

16 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay. Um, and then for the
17 case management -- because I know that for the
18 homebound delivery meals, you have to go through the
19 case management agencies, and I'm so sorry for
20 forgetting the timeline for that RFP -- but was that
21 already issued? Or is that coming up in the
22 following fiscal year for the new for the new case
23 management?

24

25

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: (to others:) It was
3 issued? (background voices) (to committee:) It
4 will be issued in mid-December.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay, got it. Got it. And
6 do you have any sense -- because, I mean, obviously,
7 this was after I left KCS already -- but do you have
8 a sense of if the RFPs for the case management
9 agencies were a bit more expanded? Meaning, I know
10 that the requirement to qualify for the case
11 management agencies is pretty high. And so in the...
12 in light of what's happening with the fact that there
13 are probably going to, especially in the next like 5-
14 10 years, there's going to be a lot more older adults
15 that need services. And so I was just wondering...

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So I want you to
17 know that you were in my head throughout that RFP,
18 which is why I thought it was issued. I've reviewed
19 that RFP so much. You were in my head about that.
20 And... and if you remember, in the last time that I
21 testify, we were a little disappointed that the case
22 management agencies chose not to subcontract with
23 other providers so that they can extend services to
24 communities of color and TRIE communities, and we
25 were very disappointed by that.

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2 So what we've done is taken two approaches,
3 right?, very much in response to that question you
4 asked me, I think, a year ago, which is: We looked
5 at, as a pilot, we have selected I think, five or
6 seven Older Adult Clubs, who have what we call
7 enriched case assistance, who are in communities of
8 color, who are community of color providers
9 traditionally, and we're piloting with them a program
10 called Case Assistance 1-Point-Whatever.

11 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And we're helping
13 them during this transition period prepare themselves
14 so that they can qualify and compete and have good
15 standing for the Case Management Program when the RFP
16 comes out, and they'll have enough rich experience.

17 So all of that to say is that we hear what you
18 say in these hearings and we try to incorporate that
19 in... in our service plans.

20 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: That's awesome. So it's
21 almost like a look-alike and then trans... preparing
22 them... using this as a stepping stone to perhaps
23 them qualify for it, right?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Mm-hmm.
25

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2 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay. Oh, okay. That's
3 good.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It was... It was
5 the same way we did with the OACs when we took all of
6 those discretionary community-of-color groups and
7 gave them technical assistance...

8 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Like COPO, yes.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: ...so that they can
10 then qualify for the RFP when OAC RFP came out. We
11 did exactly... I'm telling you: You were in our
12 head... you were in my head. And so that's exactly
13 what we did with the case management.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Awesome.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Alright? And by
16 the way, can I just respond to Chair Hudson? I have
17 some numbers for you. I know I read them last night.
18 Home-delivered meals, the waitlist is 61. Homecare,
19 the waitlist is 277 people, and I hope we can address
20 that later. And case management right now, it's 1742
21 on the waiting for... for the second assessment,

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry. The case management
23 number was what 1000...?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: The case
25 management? 1742.

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And this... this
4 model in the case management agency, RFP now, we
5 think may help address some of that by incorporating
6 new partners into it.

7 And the... for your... Can I jump back to...?

8 Okay.

9 And for the pilot, we're doing it with KCS, COPO,
10 RAICES, Hamilton-Madison, and SHOPP. The Enhanced
11 Case Assistance (whatever we're calling it, I forgot
12 the real name, but that's alright) so that they could
13 qualify for when the RFP comes out.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Oh, that's good to know.

15 Thank you for that. And a more budget-related
16 question: Because I think in the November budget
17 mod, it looks like there are supposed to be cuts of
18 about \$4.3 million to the case management services.

19 And so how... If you could just describe to us
20 how that's going to impact the programming, how it
21 relates to spending, and also just given all the
22 costs of inflation with food and... you know, food
23 inflation costs and raw food costs and everything
24 that keeps going up, how can we sort of, you know...

25

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2 other than obviously throwing money at the situation,
3 like how do we how do we help with that?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So for HDM, you...
5 if you recall, we have \$60 million for our home-
6 delivered meals. Of that I believe there were \$2
7 million in 21 to address the food increase to \$10.58.
8 And then we had additional money for 22, which
9 increased the food costs for \$11-and-something-cents,
10 so that we were addressing some of that. So it
11 mitigates it a bit in all kinds of different meals.
12 That is not to say that it answers it all.

13 The... The unfortunate silver lining in the OACs
14 is that because we're not at full capacity. There is
15 an ability -- although we're being very careful not
16 to allow too much money to be diverted, it has to
17 stay within food because we don't want other... you
18 know anything to take away from food security. So
19 that you know is that temporary response. But we
20 work closely with OMB on these issues.

21 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Yeah. Yeah. If you could
22 let us know how that's impacting, so that we can then
23 know how to respond and support in other ways, that
24 would be great.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. Yeah. So
3 it's... So just for your... for your information,
4 and inflation has affected us in three ways, right?
5 It's gas. It's food costs, right? And then it's...
6 it's access to stuff because of supply chains. So
7 we've had, you know, those kinds of three challenges.

8 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay. And then also, just
9 one last question, I'm sorry, about the SNAP
10 benefits.

11 So I know that a lot of the older adults in for
12 example, my district may be eligible for SNAP, but
13 are not necessarily taking advantage of it. So are
14 there ways that you and I can partner on this to...
15 or not just me, but obviously, all of our
16 Councilmembers, right?, in our districts? Like, are
17 there programs that you have? Or, you know, how can
18 New York City Aging partner with our offices to help
19 us do the outreach to our older adults? Because I
20 know that the ones who are going to the OACs are
21 already being reached, but then outside of that, how
22 do we...?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So, thank you for
24 that question. Because I'm going to... I'm going to
25 amend that request for assistance.

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2 So we would welcome partnership with your offices
3 on both getting the word out about SCRIE, because
4 only 50% of the people are eligible for SCRIE, and if
5 you... if your rent gets frozen, then you have more
6 money, and then you can deal with your food
7 insecurity, right? And then we would also welcome
8 your partnership with SNAP. I would... I... At this
9 point, I would like to give a great shout out to our
10 mayor, who is looking at this thing called My City,
11 which would be a game changer for all of us, which is
12 a universal application process where people who will
13 automatically be eligible will be deemed eligible,
14 and then we'll add either options to... to opt out.
15 But that is exactly the vision that we have: Make
16 every... We know who's eligible, enroll them, and
17 then let them self-select out if they don't want the
18 benefit, rather than spend all the money on outreach.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Is that... Is that just an
20 idea that was proposed? Or do you know if it
21 actually going to happen?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It's not an idea.
23 It's... You know, as we... As this administration
24 says: "Get stuff done." It is being very actively
25 looked at with the CTO for... It's going to start

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2 with a group of agencies, but we're looking at all of
3 those benefits. And we have the aging cabinet, which
4 also accelerates that conversation.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Okay, great. Thank you.

6 Thank you, Chairs.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, I just have a couple of
9 more questions. How much is... How much in the new
10 federal stimulus funding has DFTA received?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I'll get back to on
12 the actual amount of the...

13 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Is there any money left from
14 the last two years?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: There's some...
16 there's some stimulus money left. I'll get you...
17 But like everyone in the city and in the nation, when
18 the stimulus money dries out, it's... it's an issue
19 we all have to manage. I can get you the amount of
20 stimulus dollars that we received, and what is
21 available. But we know that by 2025... or 2026...
22 2025, there... You know, that stimulus money will no
23 longer be available.

24 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: So you know you're going to
25 receive some next year? 2023?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We've received what
3 we're going to receive.

4 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: You don't know how much is
5 that?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No. I don't... I
7 don't have that with me right now. I... I commit to
8 getting that to you.

9 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: So what is your plan when you
10 do receive that? Well... what is your plans for that
11 resources... those funds?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We've used much of
13 that. We've used much of that money for our
14 expansion, for our community care plan, for several
15 other things.

16 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Your Community Care Plan?
17 What is that? Explain that a little.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: The Community Care
19 Plan is the five-year strategic plan that we built,
20 so that we could increase our community-based
21 services, which is what we're talking about the home-
22 delivered meals, you know, the Older Adult Clubs and
23 all of those services.

24 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay. I'm going to... You
25 said that the RFP... the Case Assistance Programs:

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2 Do you feel any of those pilot... not pilot but other
3 organizations will become a full, Older Adult Center
4 like the adults at centers that are not centers, that
5 they are now serving our seniors food. And you just
6 spoke...

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: You know, if you're
8 asking will we be able to expand or issue an RFP for
9 Older Adult Centers...?

10 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Yes. You said you have this
11 RFPs for Case Assistant Programs. You will be...

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Case management.
13 Case management services are separate and apart from
14 Older Adult Clubs, right?

15 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And what... what
17 the conversation that I was having with Councilmember
18 Lee, a few seconds ago...

19 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: That was regarding an RFP.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: was about Case
21 Management and getting Older Adult Clubs who have
22 always had a rich case... Case Assistance Program on
23 a pilot basis to get them... to give them some
24 services and technical support, so that they will be
25 eligible to apply for the case management part.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Well, will any of these clubs
3 you filled can now look forward to becoming a full
4 Older Adult Center... Adult Clubs?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: They are Older
6 Adult Clubs now. They can look forward to it the
7 technical assistance and apply and compete for case
8 management service... to become a case management
9 service.

10 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Oh. Compete for it. Okay.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: The other way
12 around.

13 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, thank you for that.
14 Great. Okay, you explained that one to me.

15 Will DFTA continue to allow grab-and-go meals for
16 their centers that prefer it is an option, even if
17 they did not include them as a planned activity in
18 the last RFP?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It is something
20 that we're constantly looking at, because we're still
21 in this, you know, new reality. But it is something
22 that we do not encourage, because it goes against...
23 uh... It's an excellent emergency service, right?
24 It's an excellent option for emerg... but we try not
25 to encourage it, because, one, we want the center's

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2 to be fully operational, and we want people to
3 participate, which is... By coming to the center,
4 you are in a congregate setting and you're
5 socializing. So the whole purpose is to combat
6 social isolation. So that's the goal.

7 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay. Thank you. I'm going
8 to turn it... Do you have any questions?

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I do.

10 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. So in what...
12 This is just going back to data collection for a
13 second. In what ways does NYC Aging collect data
14 that identifies food insecurity? And how does NYC
15 Aging define food insecure?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That's a great
17 question. We collect data by... We collect data from
18 our own from our own clients. We collect data from
19 the from the participants. We collect data from the
20 home-delivered meals clients. We look at data from
21 all of the other services that we provide that are
22 not OACs or HDM, and that is what we look at. How we
23 define food insecurity is the inability... simple
24 inability or access or affordability.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The inability to access...?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We don't define...

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What did you say? The
4 inability to access...

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Inability or
6 access.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, got it. Right.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And income.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does NYC Aging have tools
10 available to determine other demographics of food
11 insecure folks it serves, like race, gender, etc.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. We serve,
13 you know, all eligible participants equally and rely
14 on self-reported data to give a picture of the
15 demographics of our clients. And... And whenever we
16 conduct a survey, we do the exact same thing that
17 people self-identify. And we, you know, it's gender,
18 race, ethnicity, LGBTQ, 65-Plus, living alone. Those
19 are kind of like the data elements that we look at,
20 that then we could extrapolate. Right, you know,
21 certain conditions.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that's helpful. And
23 then just going to... back to the budget and finance
24 a little bit. The November Budget Modification
25 included a \$4.3 million cut to case management

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2 services. And, excuse me, I have a cough drop in my
3 mouth.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That's okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So what specifically is this
6 cut impacting?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Let me... I'm going
8 to consult with my staff because I don't believe that
9 there is a cut.

10 Yeah, that there was a delay in amending the
11 contract. So those were the savings that we had. So
12 there's not a...

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Delay in the Medicaid
14 Contract, you said?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Amending the
16 contract. So it's a cost savings, which that was
17 taken... taken back, so it's not a cut in services.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so this does... does
19 this then relate to the pending RFP for case
20 management programs or no?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: No. Okay. So the \$4.3
23 million is a cost savings?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Is a cost savings.
25 Right. Let me ask what... Jose if that's the correct

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2 terminology. (To others:) Can I call... call it a
3 savings? (To committee:) Yes, I can call it a
4 savings...

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: ...because it was
7 money allocated that was not used and then retreated.
8 Alright?

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay but...

10 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: But it did not
11 impact services,

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But might you have a use for
13 that money?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: When we're facing
15 cuts, we try to do... find funding where we do not
16 have to impact services. And if that's a model then
17 that was it.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So I just want to
19 state this for the record that my concern is that we
20 have a booming older adult population, and the NYC
21 Aging budget is one of the smallest if not the
22 smallest of all city agencies. There's... It's the
23 smallest capital budget. I mean, we... you have no
24 money. So a \$4.3 million savings, I would argue,
25 could be used for clearing case management waitlists,

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2 you know, other... other things that are greatly
3 needed. Um... So...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah, it's part of
5 looking at the economic situation of the city. I
6 agree with you... everything that you have said for
7 the record. That said, in our partnership with OMB,
8 it's constantly looking at how to position ourselves,
9 you know, and also what the economic situation is.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, I mean, I would just
11 argue that the... the economic situation is only
12 going to become more dire when we have a greater
13 population of older adults, and then fewer services
14 and resources. And again, just for the record, there
15 are other agencies with far greater budgets -- and
16 bloated budgets, I would argue -- that could sustain
17 cuts that I think aging cannot. So...

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Thank you for your
19 supportive advocacy.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Alright. So just confirming
21 the \$4.3 million is not in your view, a cut. Do you
22 have an estimate of how many people who were
23 previously receiving congregate meals before the
24 pandemic transitioned to home-delivered meals due to

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2 mobility or cognitive challenges or other personal
3 issues?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I wasn't... I'm
5 sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Let me repeat that.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you have an estimate of
9 how many people who were previously receiving
10 congregate meals before the pandemic, transitioned to
11 home-delivered meals due to mobility or cognitive
12 challenges or other personal issues? So you gave us
13 some of the numbers earlier about...

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I gave you that for
15 recovery meals, but I don't have the transition
16 number from... from OACs to HDM.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I'll get that to
19 you.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, great.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We had that number.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then if you... if
23 it's possible, we'd be curious to know also
24 specifically due to mobility, or cognitive challenges

25

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2 or other or other sort of like personal issues, or
3 maybe things that came up...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We'll... We'll ask
5 the case management agency that categorize them...

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: ...by those
8 factors.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That would be helpful.

10 Alright. Can you just confirm... also going back to
11 the 4.3 million: Was there meant to be an expansion?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Will there be an
13 expansion?

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The \$4.3 million that you're
15 saying was a cost savings. Was there meant to be...?

16 Hold on second.

17 (background voices)

18 Okay, sorry about that just needed to make sure I
19 had my numbers, right. So there was supposed to be,
20 I believe, a \$3 million expansion of case management
21 at adoption.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. So that's not
24 happening?

25

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That's not
3 happening. But I want to be clear that the \$4.1
4 million savings is a one-time factor. You know, it
5 doesn't get carried over... over and over again. I

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I have 4.3. But is it 4.1?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: 4.3.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No. You've got the
10 right number. That was a one-time, you know, sweep.
11 In other words, then everything goes restored, you
12 know, in subsequent budgets.

13 CHAIR HUDSON: Mm-hmm. But you're saying that
14 the... the \$3 million is part of that or is not part
15 of that?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It probably was
17 part of that. Can I get back to you? I can't do a
18 clear answer on that.

19 CHAIR HUDSON: But it seems like he has the
20 answer now. Yeah.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. (To others:)
22 Tells me. (background voices) Oh, you're not sworn
23 in. You can't... (background voices) (To
24 Committee:) I'll get back to you on that. I'll give
25 you I'll give you a very clear answer on that.

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you want to swear
3 him in?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Jose?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you want to... you want
6 to be sworn in Jose?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Jose... You could
8 be sworn in Jose. No? No, he wants to clarify. He
9 wants to get you the right...

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Alright? Thanks.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Alright. That's fine.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It is not... It's
14 not a delay tactic. It's really an accuracy tactic.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I... listen I've...

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I've got to give
17 you the respect of that.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I got it. And, you know,
19 we're putting Jose on the spot. So I get it. It's
20 it's all good. And apologies. That wasn't the
21 intent.

22 But okay, so yes, if we can just get some... some
23 follow up on that and where the numbers are, that
24 would be helpful.

25

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And when you...
3 when you... we'll get... give us the precise answer
4 that you want. So we can give you the correct
5 answer.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. We will.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And you want the
8 distinction between the \$3 million and the \$4.3
9 million.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We'll include that and the
11 follow up.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Okay, great.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I just have one question, and
15 then when I'll turn it back over to my colleague:
16 Have any Older Adult Centers express a need for
17 infrastructure improvements, such as HVAC system
18 upgrades, or air, lif... I can't say, lift-eration
19 systems, which would help older adults feel safe...
20 safer and conjugate settings?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We have a whole
22 unit that works with the Older Adult Clubs, and
23 looking at their needs. And we also have...

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Have any of the centers
25 requested it?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Oh, we have a long
3 list of requests of repairs as well as HVA Cissues.
4 We have \$4 million dedicated to HVAC, and all of
5 those issues, and we do that on a on a much-needed...
6 on as-needed, and also prioritize those that are
7 emergencies. If you know that replacing and
8 repairing HVAC system is extremely costly. And so we
9 have a \$4-point... a \$4 million budget for that.

10 CHAIRPERSON MEAILY: Okay, thank you. I just
11 wanted to know.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Then I'll acknowledge that
14 we've been joined by Councilmember Dinowitz.

15 Okay, utilization rates are still not back up to
16 pre-pandemic levels that many OACs, including for
17 their congregate meal programs, in large part due to
18 persistent public health fears from older adults
19 about attending congregate activities. As we head
20 into the depths of winter, older adults are
21 particularly vulnerable to the triple threat of flu,
22 COVID, and RSV. I know that my colleague Chair Mealy
23 just asked one question related to this, but how is
24 DFTA currently working with OACs to assess the
25 utilization rates of centers and congregate meals?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We are working with
3 them regularly. It's one of the topics that I bring
4 up in my monthly meetings with providers. It's one
5 of the concerns that we look at. And I look at it
6 for... from two perspectives. I look at it from the
7 needs of the older adults and the concern about
8 social isolation, and the impact that that may have
9 long term. I look at it in terms of... if... if not
10 Older Adult Clubs, what can we come up with as
11 modalities where we can still deal with food
12 insecurity and social isolation. So it's not just
13 like a grab-and-go. We looking we look at things
14 like commissary kitchens. Maybe we can have more
15 pro... programs, providing more meals, so that people
16 can have choices. We're always looking at what the
17 next step should be in terms of making sure that
18 older adults get food.

19 But then I look at it from a public policy
20 perspective, and I get... So I want to be ahead of
21 the curve before an oversight agency, you know,
22 beyond us, at the federal level or the state level
23 says, "Maybe this model doesn't work, or we should
24 not fund to this level." That's another concern that
25

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2 is constantly weighing on me as we're looking at
3 underutilization at Older Adult Clubs.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Is there any
5 indication about why some OACs have higher
6 utilization than others?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I think it's... I
8 think it's a combination of... There's so many
9 factors as to why older adults are not coming out in
10 this new reality. You have family members who are
11 prohibiting you from going out, that you have your
12 own concerns (every time we think that there's a new
13 normalcy coming back, you know, we have a spike or
14 this news around flu and a new variant), and all of
15 those things affect us. It also is... You know,
16 the... each Older Adult Club is its own entity, and
17 has its own outreach methods, and its own recruitment
18 opportunities. So all of those weigh into why some
19 are... have a higher participation rate than others.

20 That's why we did the Join Us campaign, which was
21 to get the word out there, not only for the older
22 adult, but also for family members to let them know
23 that those Older Adult Clubs are okay, they're safe.
24 We're also you know, going back to using our
25 guidance, never going away from the pandemic

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2 guidance, you know, all of us, with the exception of
3 me, but I've walked in with my mask, are wearing
4 masks... wisely. And so those are the things that we
5 kind of continue to encourage.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So I'm just going to ask
7 this question for the record, but I believe that you
8 just answered it: Do OACs follow some kind of
9 standard protocol for the safety precautions they
10 take to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID, flu,
11 and other airborne viruses?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. We have the
13 guidance out there. And... and we strongly encourage
14 the use of masks and the other guidance that we've
15 put out there.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then is there any
17 particular way that OACs are informing older adults
18 of these measures that they're taking to create safe,
19 healthy, and sanitary environments? Do they have
20 things like, you know, posted up? Are they just
21 communicating with people once they come into the
22 centers? Or how is that actually being communicated?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I think... I think
24 it goes back to my... my previous answer. So it's
25 depends on the Older Adult Club. That they each have

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2 a different approach and the way they're
3 communicating the information. But I think all of us
4 are... are creating a cacophony of message which is:
5 We are safe. We are open. We're available. Join
6 us.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And do you know, or can you
8 confirm if OACs are adhering to indoor masking per
9 the health commissioners recommendation? And it
10 sounds like you're... you're supportive of that.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. We... We
12 strongly encourage masking, although we've never had
13 a mask mandate, the guidance says that we strongly
14 encourage.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: (To others:) We
17 did have a mess mandate? (To committee:) I'm sorry.
18 I corrected myself, and then I look back to confirm.
19 But right now it's... it's strongly encouraged.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: (To others:) Did
22 you want to give me a note? (background voices)
23 Yeah. Right.

24

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And then what's... what's
3 been the biggest barrier or challenge that aging has
4 identified in the daily participation rate of OACs?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I think fear. Fear
6 and insecurity. Or the ability to adapt to this new
7 reality. You know, those that are factors

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. I just also want
9 to acknowledge that we've been joined by
10 Councilmember Lynn Schulman and Councilmember
11 Dinowitz, I believe has a question or two.

12 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: (inaudible).

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Go for it.

14 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Is it afternoon yet?
15 No. Good morning, Commissioner. Good to see you
16 again.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Good to see you.

18 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Hope you're doing well.
19 I have... I think it's a third hearing in the room,
20 I'm going to ask a similar question to what I've
21 asked before, which is... I guess you call it a
22 cabinet. How's the cabinet going? And the reason
23 I'm... the reason I'm asking is because in previous
24 hearings, I've asked a question to just ask, "Can the
25 government you know, kind of talk to itself?" And so

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2 for example, when you have intake forms at an Older
3 Adult Center, and... are you asking about income, and
4 then as a result, or are you sharing that information
5 with Department of Finance or relevant agencies to
6 help -- as a government entity -- help older adults
7 sign up for whatever benefits to which they're
8 entitled. We've spoken before about Mitchell-
9 Lamas... city-run Mitchell-Lamas, and that income
10 affidavit... having the income and the age on it. Is
11 that being shared with Department of Finance? I
12 suggested prefilled SCRIE applications being sent to
13 those residents. I sense by a smile on your face,
14 there's something moving, but there's a lot of
15 instances -- veterans too... veteran question on the
16 intake form -- and then actually have something
17 happening by the government subsequent to that, to
18 actually make life just easier to make... to make it
19 easier to actually sign up for those benefits,
20 without having to go through a whole other process,
21 asking for the same exact information again.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So I believe that
23 when government talks to itself, it's a great day,
24 because we're not operating in silos. And I applaud

25

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2 this cabinet. So I know that you agree with me on
3 that.

4 The work of the cabinet far... This is weird.

5 Like, we just had our second meeting of the cabinet,

6 but the workgroups have worked all along, and it's

7 all of the things that you talked about. How is it

8 that we share information? How is it that we make

9 ease of access to applications? And to services?

10 How is it that we can have a universal form or

11 process, you know, so that people don't have to apply

12 for SCRIE and SNAP. All of them which have so...

13 similar kind of requirements? So it is that

14 conversation. And then there's more, which is what

15 gratifies me so much. As we look at: What are the

16 policies? What are the funding structures? You

17 know, like, why is it that so much of the funding is

18 geared towards long term care and not community care?

19 Can we... You know, so we look... we're looking at

20 all of those kinds of policy and... and questions so

21 that people can live in the communities. If they

22 have the proper supports, they're healthier. 90% of

23 people choose to live in their... in their respective

24 homes rather than be institutionalized. So we're

25 looking at, as a cabinet, all of those questions.

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2 And I know that we're onto something as many
3 agencies keep approaching us to say, can we be in the
4 cabinet? Because we selected the 17 that we thought
5 had the greatest impact on... on older adult life.
6 You know... Hous... And tackling the big issues:
7 Housing, health, all of those, you know, finance,
8 looking at security, public safety, big partnership
9 with the police department on that so...

10 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah. And you know, how
11 much we both care about SCRIE. And... No, it's
12 encouraging to hear that these meetings are
13 happening. Now, in those meetings has have goals or
14 timelines been set up? And in other words, can we
15 expect at this time next year, that a person who goes
16 to an older adult center and puts... checks off that
17 they're a veteran and puts in their income that this
18 time next year, they'll get... automatically get a
19 SNAP form filled out for them in the mail, or the
20 social worker will take them to the computer and fill
21 out everything for them. I mean, what can we expect?
22 And what is the timeline?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: You can expect
24 aggressive movement towards that. The CTO and... You
25 know, that is what the goal is, right? Can I promise

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2 you that by this time next year that will all be
3 complete? No, I don't I don't have enough...

4 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: No, that's not what I
5 really meant. My... My question is, have you set up
6 a timeline... like an internal timeline or goal...
7 has there hasn't been goal setting?

8 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We have a timeline
9 for June, which I will be talking to you more about.
10 We have a timeline for June to see some projects, you
11 know, movement... great movement on certain projects.
12 We have some longer term visions. We are hoping to
13 present some of the findings of the cabinet and the
14 action. This is an action plan cabinet. This is not
15 a white paper think tank. This is about putting
16 things in place so that we could really make this an
17 age inclusive city.

18 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah. The truth is, I
19 would mostly like to come back at some hearing and
20 ask a different question. That's my... That's my
21 goal.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: You know what I
23 will do for you? I will give you an update, and Kate
24 and my staff will kill me right now. I will give you

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2 an update on the on some of the projects that we
3 have.

4 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Where's Kate?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: She's not here.

6 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Oh, you pointed to her
7 like she was here.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I thought she was
9 here.

10 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: Me too. I pointed at
11 someone who's not Kate.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I promised to give
13 the Aging Committee an update on what we're looking
14 at in the Aging Cabinet, alright? And... But it's an
15 update and a vision for where we expect to go,
16 alright. We can give that to you now.

17 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: I appreciate that.
18 That's all. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And you will keep
20 asking me the questions, because they will always...
21 this will always be another question.

22 COUNCILMEMBER DINOWITZ: You know I'm going to
23 keep asking. I don't know why I said I'm going to
24 stop asking. I'm going to keep asking the question.

25

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2 COUNCILMEMBER MEALY: Okay, I have one question
3 about the food pantries and the soup kitchens.

4 Describe a DFTA partnered with the food banks and the
5 soup kitchens across the city to provide assistance
6 to food insecure older adults.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: You know, the way I
8 can best answer that is to say that we have a network
9 of 308 Older Adult Clubs out there.

10 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: How can you tell older
11 adult... um... "Well, you could go to this food
12 kitchen, they have hot food." Like every other
13 Wednesday in front of my office, I do hot food. So
14 how do DFTA relate to the seniors telling them where
15 to go? Do you all have other bulletin boards to let
16 them know?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So... So that's
18 what I was... I was going to get to. Each Older
19 Adult Center throughout the city has relationships
20 with a myriad of community service providers in
21 the... in their community. And they are the ones
22 that exchange programs and service information about
23 each other to each other. If there is a particular
24 program that you would like us to share information
25 with, you know, we will be more than happy to do

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2 that. But there... I trust and I have a lot of
3 confidence in the network of nonprofits and the
4 relationships that they have built in their community
5 to make sure that people are familiar with and can
6 avail themselves of other services in that community.

7 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I'm going to turn it over.
8 She's going to have the last questions, I believe.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Does
10 DFTA... Does Aging currently have... excuse me.
11 Does Aging have current data on how many older adults
12 in New York City are relying on food banks and soup
13 kitchens for at least some of their meals?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No, we don't. And
15 I don't even know that I can get you that data. We
16 can probably give you a sense of that. But...

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, alright.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I can give you how
19 many of our programs have food pantries and... and
20 other kinds of services within their own operation.
21 I can give you that.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, that would...
23 that's... that's helpful. Do OACs advertise
24 neighborhood food banks and soup kitchens, or refer

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2 food-insecure older adults to those facilities?

3 Which is I think some of what you just addressed

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: They do. They
5 have... you know, it's like they do that on a
6 community basis.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then just the
8 last... last few here.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Just for the record, how
11 many older adults received meals through the Recovery
12 Meals Program.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Uh... The initial
14 number was about 22,000. Towards the end of the
15 program that we stayed in contact with to make sure
16 that they were well-positioned to address their food
17 insecurity was 11,000. And those are the numbers I
18 gave you earlier.

19 COUNCILMEMBER HUDSON: Earlier. Yeah. Okay.
20 Have all of the former recovery meals clients been
21 screened for home-delivered meals and SNAP?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: They've been
23 screened...

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I know they've been...

25

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: ...they've been
3 identified and told that they were eligible for home-
4 delivered meals. And I gave you number...

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And what about SNAP? Yeah,
6 you gave me the number for HDM was 1295.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Right. Right.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But what about SNAP?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I don't have a
10 number for SNAP, but I was. (background voices) Oh,
11 I see. They might not be eligible for... for SNAP,
12 but they've been contacted and informed about it.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Um, what's the status
14 of the funds the city has invested for home-delivered
15 meals and case management programs in FY 23, and has
16 that money been spent or allocated yet?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We have \$60 million
18 for home-delivered meals. And I don't know the
19 number for case... for... for OACs. Okay... (To
20 others:) How much? (background voices)

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and then what about...

22 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: (To others:) \$5
23 million? (To committee:) Yeah, \$60 million on... on
24 home-delivered meals. I'll get back to you on OACs.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. And then...

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And we'll... and
3 we'll separate it from OACs and NORCs, or do you want
4 that distinction, or do you just want it in one lump?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Distinction will be great.

6 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Okay.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We can take both of them.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Alright, we'll give
9 them to you both ways.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, hold on one second.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: I do have the
12 number of the amount of stimulus dollars.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, that's good.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Okay, if you want
15 that. I had omitted that before because I... I
16 didn't find that page. But I know I... I believe the
17 number is \$84 million.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: This is the stimulus for FY
19 22, 23, or 24?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We received a total
21 of \$84 million.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: \$84 million across which
23 fiscal years?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yeah. For stimulus
25 dollars. All of that was for FY 22.

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: For FY 22. Okay. Can you
3 describe how the money was spent In FY 22?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That was the
5 numbers we said that we would get back to you on
6 earlier.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Okday.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That was the...
9 That was the whole thing about Jose testifying...

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. Right. Okay. Okay.
11 Thank you. Okay, I'm just going to skip around for a
12 second, if you don't mind.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know the status of
15 the \$60 million -- I think maybe it's now \$68 million
16 -- of funding for workforce enhancement for human
17 services workers.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yes. We... We
19 received our allocation. And that allocation was
20 distributed to the nonprofits.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And sorry. Is that \$60? Or
22 \$68 million?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: It was \$60 million
24 for the entire city. Citywide it was \$60 million for
25 the workforce enhancement. (background voices) \$68

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2 million citywide. (To others:) And that portion was
3 what?

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: \$68. And it's been sent to
5 the providers.

6 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: And the
7 Department... New York City Aging got \$4 million, and
8 we distributed that to the to the Older... to the
9 whole network, frankly.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And... so do you know that
11 those... the network has actually... they've
12 confirmed receipt?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Yes. We also
14 addressed... Jose is going to give me... burn the
15 back of my head. We also addressed salary in the
16 case management agencies because of this delay. We
17 also addressed the salary... salary increases.
18 Because as you know, salary parity is a real concern
19 for New York City agents because we lose staff to
20 other agencies. And so we've increased the salaries
21 for case man... for specific titles in the case
22 management portfolio.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Just going back really
24 quickly to the cabinet question from Councilmember

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2 Dinowitz. Does the Mayor's Office of Food Policy
3 attend the cabinet meetings?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Does the what?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Mayor's Office of Food
6 Policy attend those cabinet meetings?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: No.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. It might be helpful
9 to have them address maybe some issues on older adult
10 food insecurity.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So, that said, they
12 don't... they do attend some of the workgroups. So
13 the cabinet is for commissioners, right.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: So in the
16 workgroups... food policy, and we've just been
17 meeting with Qiana Mickie from the Urban Agriculture
18 to really come up with some ways to collaborate. So
19 they are part of the workgroups, but they...

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Okay, great. Just
21 give me one second. Sorry.

22 Thanks for your... Thanks for your patience.
23 Sorry. I'm just trying to, to sort of, I guess,
24 assess and figure out... there seems to be a greater
25 need than, you know, we're addressing. So as far as

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2 like home-delivered meals, case management, things
3 like that: How do you sort of...?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: We know... And
5 we've always known, and we continuously say that
6 needs outpace resources. You've... you went on the
7 record to identify how, in your... in your opinion.
8 It is a constant conversation that we have with OMB
9 and work with OMB to really address, you know, our
10 new needs. They recognized our new needs, last year
11 when we looked at home-delivered meals, and gave us
12 the increases necessary.

13 So it's a constant conversation that we have in
14 our partnership with OMB to address these... these
15 issues.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That being said
18 there's, you know, there's economic reality out there
19 that were... were part of that conversation too.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. Thank you. Those
21 are all the questions I have. Chair Mealy?

22 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I just have one. You said
23 the waiting lists went down to 61. What is the
24 contributing factor you think why that list went
25 down?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: When we... Why we
3 have a waiting list now that we did not have before:
4 When we had recovery meals... recovery meals, was
5 someone who was identified food insecure, they
6 immediately got a recovery meal. So there was a
7 default. With the... with the elimination or the
8 ending of that program, that provision is not there,
9 alright? And so right now it is when the home-
10 delivered meals provider has the capacity, alright?
11 And so that's what we are... that's what we are
12 dealing with.

13 And you know, the need may be here, let's say in
14 South Bronx, but the capacity... availability might
15 be in Brooklyn. So there's a lot of factors that
16 weigh into: How is it that we can address that?

17 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, my colleague is going
18 to have the last question.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Very last. I'm sorry. I
20 just was looking through your testimony, and I
21 remember that I had a question from here. You
22 mentioned and I'll just quote your... your testimony
23 here:

24 "In recent weeks, OACs has a call category to
25 Aging Connect. NYC Aging's in-house Contact Center

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2 has increased since the start of the campaign, and
3 we're hopeful this is a sign of increased attendance
4 at our centers."

5 I'm just curious to know if you... buy how much
6 of an increase that's been if you have that number.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: That's... We're
8 looking at that right now. That is something that
9 we're trying to determine. We know that there's been
10 a lot of inquiry, but what we don't have is the
11 data... is how does that translate into actual
12 participation at the local level?

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, great. Thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: We want to thank you,
16 Commissioner, for attending this important hearing.
17 Looking forward to data coming back to us. Thank
18 you.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTÉS-VÁZQUEZ: Thank you. Thank
20 you, and if I don't see you, I wish you all a happy
21 and safe holiday.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Same to you. Thank you so
23 much.

24 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.
25

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2 COUNSEL: Okay. At this time, we're going to be
3 moving on to public testimony. As a reminder,
4 written testimony can be submitted up to 72 hours
5 following the hearing. So we're going to be taking
6 people who are in person first, and then we'll... we
7 will be moving on to people testifying on Zoom.

8 So just call up the first panel here. We have
9 Loretta Wilson and Donna Coles from Greenwich House,
10 and Brianna Paden-Williams from LiveOn New York, and
11 Tara Klein from United Neighborhood Houses.

12 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Could you come sit at the
13 table please? And we could start.

14 COUNSEL: And Loretta, we can... Loretta is here?
15 (background voices) Okay. Okay, so Donna Coles, you
16 can... we can start with you. Great. Thank you.
17 Please proceed.

18 MS. COLES: My name is Donna Coles and I am the
19 Assistant Director of Westbeth Older Adult Center at
20 Greenwich House. Thank you Chair Hudson, Chair
21 Mealy, and fellow City Councilmembers for this
22 opportunity to testify. Since Greenwich House was
23 founded 120 years ago, we have been committed to
24 addressing the needs of New Yorkers of all ages
25 through arts and education programs, health services,

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2 and older adult services. Greenwich House is proud
3 to operate a network of five older adult centers in
4 Manhattan, offering our members vital social,
5 educational, physical, and cultural resources. We
6 applaud the Committee for seeking opportunities to
7 address food insecurity among older adults, which is
8 a challenge we see every day at Westbeth and across
9 our network.

10 The impact of inflation for older adults is
11 undeniable. 11% of New Yorkers over the age of 60
12 experienced food insecurity in 2020. But it is
13 likely higher now. Every day we hear from our
14 participants that they are being forced to make
15 impossible choices between covering their rent,
16 paying for medication, and buying food. Many are
17 going through their savings and at the end of their
18 ropes. Just last week, a gentleman came to us crying
19 because he didn't have enough food. It was
20 heartbreaking.

21 Across our older adult centers we serve about 250
22 meals a day, five days a week. With inflation. We
23 have noticed the funding received per meal does not
24 go as far with our vendor. Meals now include cheaper
25

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3 cuts of meat. We used to receive a variety of fruit
4 like kiwis and bananas. Now we mostly get apples.

5 The city should consider increasing the funding
6 per meal to ensure we can provide seniors with
7 quality, nutritious foods. We are only currently
8 funded to serve lunch, but we know if we could serve
9 breakfast snacks and even dinner, there would be no
10 shortage of demand. Our recent City Council
11 initiative that was very helpful to our participants
12 was the Fresh Food For Seniors Program. Seniors
13 could buy a large bag of fresh produce from local
14 farmers for just \$10. This kind of food program is a
15 wonderful complement to our onsite meals. Our
16 seniors love being able to make salads and soups at
17 home.

18 Overall more funding per meal, the opportunity to
19 serve breakfast and snacks, and more initiatives that
20 provide older adults with affordable, nutritious food
21 would go a long way for our community, especially as
22 inflation is squeezing budgets. Greenwich House
23 applauds New York City Council for working to address
24 food insecurity for our older community members.

25 I thank the Committee for the opportunity to
testify today.

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2 COUNSEL: Thank you. Moving on to Loretta
3 Wilson.

4 MS. WILSON: My name is Loretta Wilson, and I'm a
5 Kitchen Aide at Westbeth Older Adult Center at
6 Greenwich House. Thank you to Chair Hudson, Chair
7 Mealy, and fellow City Councilmembers for this
8 opportunity to testify. Greenwich House provides
9 educational programs, health service, and older adult
10 services. Greenwich House operates a network of five
11 Older Adult Centers in Manhattan, offering our
12 members vital social, educational, physical, and
13 cultural resources.

14 I have worked in older adult service for over 20
15 years and I have never seen seniors facing the kinds
16 of challenges that they are up against right now.
17 Data shows that poverty rates increased for older
18 adults in 2021. So many people tell us that they
19 can't afford groceries. As a kitchen aide, I serve
20 lunch to our members every day and I get to know
21 them. They are like family. Our center is open
22 until 1 pm on Saturdays. When we are closed over the
23 weekend, a lot of our members tell me they do not
24 have access to much food until we open again on
25 Tuesday.

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3 For example, I recently became concerned about
4 one of our members who is 86 years old. She came in
5 on a Tuesday and said she wasn't feeling well. And I
6 encouraged her to get something to eat. I learned it
7 was the first proper meal since Saturday. If we had
8 funding to provide frozen meals to ensure members
9 have something to eat over the weekend, that will
10 really help.

11 We are we are currently only funded to serve
12 lunch, but I often put out leftovers, bread, and
13 fruits in the morning so members can have a small
14 breakfast. Funding for a proper breakfast and snacks
15 would also help us better meet the needs of our
16 community.

17 Many of our members have mobility challenges, and
18 can't easily get to a food bank. The nearby grocery
19 stores are very expensive. They rely on us. It's
20 hard not to be able to give them everything they
21 need.

22 Overall, more funding per meal, the opportunity
23 to serve breakfast and snacks, and the ability to
24 provide more frozen meals for weekends would really
25 help our community. Thank you to New York City
Council for working to address food insecurity for

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2 our old community members, and thank you to the
3 Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

4 Thank you.

5 COUNSEL: Thank you. Moving on to Brianna Payton
6 Williams.

7 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: Hello, I'm Brianna Paden-
8 Williams, the Communications and Policy Associate
9 here at LiveOn New York. And thank you to Chair
10 Mealy and Chair Hudson for the opportunity to testify
11 today. In addition, we just want to show our
12 appreciation also to DFTA, Now NYC Aging, for all
13 their work and under the leadership of Commissioner
14 Cortés-Vázquez, including the recent establishment of
15 the Cabinet on Aging.

16 So LiveOn New York's members include more than
17 100 Community Based nonprofits that provide core
18 services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our
19 community as we age. And as we know from many older
20 New Yorkers, food insecurity remains a harsh reality
21 of daily living. And even prior to the pandemic,
22 many older adults relied on meals from Older Adult
23 Centers for more than half of their daily nutritional
24 intake. And here in New York City, an estimated 21%
25 of older adults living in New York City are facing

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2 poverty and too often are having to choose between
3 paying for their rent or buying food. And for our
4 growing diverse aging population, Older Adult Centers
5 were and continue to be a lifeline during the
6 pandemic, particularly in response to the increased
7 risk of food insecurity and a rise in social
8 isolation that has plagued so many older adults.

9 And so the city has an opportunity to create long
10 term solutions and make meaningful investments to
11 ensure all New Yorkers have access to equitable
12 community-based services in their community. And in
13 response to that LiveOn New York encourages the city
14 to assess and allocate funding for the significant
15 inflation impacts on raw gas and food price. And as
16 we've heard today, this really continues to be an
17 unavoidable financial strain that has created
18 challenges for providers to continue to meet the
19 growing capacity for home-delivered meals as well as
20 congregate meals.

21 We also encourage the city to continue to support
22 new models of service including grab-and-go meals.
23 And these new models of service were really critical
24 and successful and ensuring, for those who aren't
25 comfortable to come back in person for congregate

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3 meals due to COVID or other personal reasons, are
4 able to still receive food.

5 In addition, we encourage the city to work with
6 Older Adult Centers to assess the utilization of
7 congregate meals at Older Adult Centers as providers
8 continue to adapt to a new normal, and it's really
9 evident that older adult centers have returned to a
10 new normal that has posed new challenges for in-
11 person services and programming, and that includes
12 congregate meals, as well as coupled with the
13 challenges voiced by older adult participants,
14 including public safety, new mobility and cognitive
15 challenges, as well as other factors. And so in
16 response to this, we really encourage the city to
17 work with Older Adult Centers to ensure that they are
18 addressing the new challenges for both older adults
19 and providers.

20 We also encourage the city to assess the demand
21 for case management to ensure all clients can be
22 screened, excuse me, for case management eligibility,
23 and receive the critical services that they are
24 eligible for. And we also encourage the city to
25 assess the demand for culturally competent meals and
congregate meals. And lastly, we encourage the city

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2 to assess the benefits... or SNAP benefits, excuse
3 me, for older adults. As we know the under-
4 utilization rates of SNAP benefits are really a major
5 problem due to stigma and misconceptions. More
6 information can be found in our written testimony and
7 thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

8 COUNSEL: Thank you. Moving on to Tara Klein.

9 MS. KLEIN: Thank you so much for the opportunity
10 to testify, Chair Mealy, Chair Hudson, and the
11 Council. My name is Tara Klein. I'm the Deputy
12 Director of Policy and Advocacy at United
13 Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a Policy and Social
14 Change organization that represents 40 settlement
15 houses in New York City. Our members provide a wide
16 variety of services that reach over 80,000 New
17 Yorkers each year. They operate programs including
18 Older Adult Centers, NORCs, home-delivered meals
19 programs, geriatric mental health and others.
20 Greenwich House is one of our members here on the
21 panel.

22 Our members also run a range of food programs
23 that reach all ages, including food pantries, and
24 urban farms, and benefits outreach for food benefits
25 like SNAP.

2 And so we really appreciate the opportunity to
3 share updates and concerns about food insecurity in
4 older adults. My written testimony has a lot more
5 information. It includes some recently released
6 census numbers that talk about the growing older
7 adult population in New York City, as well as showing
8 that the population is getting more racially diverse,
9 more older adults are living alone, and there are
10 more older adults who are reliant on SNAP food
11 benefits.

12 Our settlement house members have indicated that
13 participation for in-person activities is still not
14 back to pre-pandemic levels. This is largely due to
15 persistent fears about COVID-19, and now influenza
16 and RSV, as well. And those centers that are able to
17 offer grab-and-go meals as well as virtual and hybrid
18 programming have seen a lot of success in that
19 flexibility, but those programs do need additional
20 support and funding in many cases for those options.

21 And I want to call out grab-and-go in particular
22 because we heard a lot about that earlier, grabbing
23 goes only technically permitted right now, if these
24 were in the RFP that were... that was completed
25 during the pandemic. So older adult centers had to

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2 have the foresight, that they would know that the
3 pandemic would be ongoing a year or two years -- who
4 knows how long this is going to last -- in order to
5 be able to offer grab-and-go. We really want to make
6 this available to anyone who wants to offer that
7 service. And so we hope you'll help us advocate to
8 DFTA to allow that flexibility.

9 And then broadly on some budgetary matters: We
10 are concerned with some issues that are really
11 quickly reaching crisis levels. And we need
12 intervention from the city. I really want to
13 highlight the record high levels of inflation, and
14 the fact that there have been no contract amendments
15 to meet inflation for home-delivered meals programs,
16 or for older adult centers for congregate meals.
17 There was a large increase in home-delivered meals
18 last year for rates and we're so appreciative for
19 that. But I'll say that that number that we reached
20 (the \$11.78 per meal) is a number we've been
21 advocating for... for many years, since before the
22 pandemic in fact, and so it does not take into
23 account recent inflation and providers really do need
24 to see another increase.

25

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2 And then I also just want to mention the growing
3 challenges with recruitment and retention of staff
4 who run these programs. Because contract values are
5 so low, there is a lot of... a huge challenge with
6 trying to hire for these positions and keep qualified
7 staff. There's competition from other industries.
8 And so we really need to see another investment from
9 the city this year for wages. And I'll say it's
10 especially difficult for folks that hire bilingual
11 caseworkers. Those job postings we've heard are
12 sometimes out there for close to a year. We're also
13 going to make a big push for additional
14 infrastructure and capital funding this year. And we
15 look forward to having your support with us when we
16 get into the budget cycle.

17 So thank you so much for your time.

18 COUNSEL: Alright, thank you all. We're going to
19 be moving on to... oops.

20 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I have a question. I just
21 saw... uh... What do you think about... How much
22 the capital... oh, that's what you just said. How
23 many vans do you think we need to be replaced in
24 these senior centers? Anyone can answer those
25 questions?

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2 MS. KLEIN: Yeah, so I know that the city
3 recently included an investment to support 44 new
4 vans at home-delivered meals programs. We have not
5 done a count of how many are needed. But we've heard
6 anecdotally that many of the contractors need more
7 than what they've been given. I know one of our
8 members said they received two vans... new vans from
9 that funding, and they're very grateful, but they
10 have other vans that are just so old and are breaking
11 down. And we also know that catalytic converter
12 thefts have been an issue.

13 And then another issue with that I'd like to
14 highlight is that subcontractors for home-delivered
15 meals programs were not eligible for... for new vans.
16 And because they're not... They don't contract
17 directly with DFTA. They work with the contractors.
18 And so that's something we'd like the city to look at
19 as well, because they have similar needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you. I definitely want
21 to look into that. Also, the subcontractors. And
22 Ms.... LiveOn New York. Could you explain to me the
23 pilot food voucher program, the go-and-dine? I
24 really like that.

25

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2 MS. PADEN-WILLIAMS: So this is a program that
3 we've seen through our members' division where they
4 have something similar where older adults can sign up
5 for vouchers at participating restaurants. This is
6 something that we've included in our recent report.
7 "Aging is Everyone's Business". And it's just a
8 program that we've seen to really increase access for
9 older adults through New York City.

10 So, you know, older adults are one way, but
11 there's also you know, the home-delivered meals, this
12 program as well as the SNAP benefits. But this is
13 something I'd love to discuss more and kind of some
14 of the ideas that we have to address, you know, the
15 food insecurity across New York City.

16 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I definitely will be meeting
17 with you in regards to that. And Ms. Wilson...
18 something in your proposal... I'm sorry. (reading
19 to self back from statement) "Across the adult
20 centers, we serve about 250 meals. With inflation...
21 we noticed that... received the meals to go...
22 vendors... meals voucher... cheaper cuts of meat."
23 Is that happening, do you feel, to the majority of
24 senior centers? Miss Coles. I'm sorry.

25

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2 MS. COLES: Yes, that's happening throughout the
3 variety of our senior centers. And can I just
4 address that... Because we can no longer do grab-and-
5 go meals, I think that is also impacting how many
6 meals we are able to do. We are ready to do much
7 more for our seniors.

8 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, thank you. Thank you,
9 panel. I will be talking to you all really soon.
10 Thank you so much.

11 MS. COLES: Thank you.

12 COUNSEL: Thank you panel. We're moving on to
13 our second in-person panel. Vik Bensen, City Meals
14 on Wheels, and then... is Eric Diaz here? Eric
15 Diaz? Alright, not seeing Eric. So I think it will
16 just be Vic Benson.

17 MS. BENSEN: Good morning. Thank you for the
18 opportunity to testify. I'm Vik Bensen, the Policy
19 Analyst at Citymeals on Wheels. I would like to
20 thank the council and Chairs Hudson and Mealy for
21 holding this important hearing on food insecurity at
22 Older Adult Centers.

23 While Citymeals works with the home-delivered
24 meal clients in the DFTA system, many of them were
25

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2 OAC attendees first, and most are served by meal
3 programs operating out of OACs.

4 Given our close relationship with the network.

5 We want to shed light on older adults caught in the
6 gap between OACs and HDM, particularly those that may
7 have attended congregate service before the pandemic
8 but haven't returned and haven't transitioned to HDM,
9 as well as former GetFood meal recipients who haven't
10 transitioned to either service.

11 We have heard a similar refrain across the
12 network: Congregate attendance has not rebounded
13 despite efforts and outreach and providers are
14 concerned with whether hungry older adults in their
15 neighborhoods are able to access food. There are not
16 suddenly fewer hungry older New Yorkers. We know
17 this is not the case. And yet programs are not
18 seeing the numbers they used to for in-person
19 services. There was a rush from the city to return
20 to normal operations as quickly as possible without
21 considering ways to seriously adapt to our COVID
22 reality.

23 We ask the city to conduct a survey of former OAC
24 attendees to learn why they haven't returned and if
25 their needs are being met, and a follow up survey on

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2 the food security of former GetFood recipients who
3 did not transfer to either program.

4 We also believe there should be a formal process
5 to allow OAC attendees to transition to HDM in the
6 short or long term.

7 Centers have attendees who stopped showing up to
8 OACs for a variety of reasons that staff does not
9 know or are unable to determine after doing outreach.
10 There should be a way to fast track vulnerable OAC
11 attendees to receive HDM and ways to notify OACs if a
12 client of theirs starts receiving HDM independently.
13 For example, an OAC attendee who knows they will be
14 going for surgery, has a bout of longer-term illness,
15 or has a mobility-limiting injury should be able to
16 sign up for HDM services through the DFTA OAC they
17 already attend. If it will only be temporary, OAC
18 should have the ability to presume eligibility and
19 enroll the attendee for the duration of their need.

20 Some programs have as we've heard, voiced the
21 desire to continue grab-and-go, but cannot because
22 they didn't opt in during this most recent RFP, a
23 time where many say they couldn't predict what the
24 pandemic would become, or its lasting effects.

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3 While OAC still struggle with attendance programs
4 that want to continue Grab-and-go should be allowed
5 and given adequate funds for the units. Offering
6 grab-and-go meals encourages older adults to have
7 contact with the vital community hubs we know OACs to
8 be. Some may not want or feel comfortable having a
9 sit down meal at a center especially during continued
10 COVID risk, and should not be denied access to
11 nutrition services.

12 If older New Yorkers were receiving GetFood or
13 grab-and-go meals, they came to city nutrition
14 services because they were hungry. It is cruel to
15 deny a hungry person food because they do not meet a
16 very narrow conception of being physically able to
17 show up and dine indoors. In our work, we see how
18 OACs and HCM programs are siloed and dealing with
19 clients, even when the meals are prepared in the same
20 kitchen. Providers want to offer bridge services.
21 And they understand that there is a middle ground
22 between those who are able and want to come in for
23 full center services and activities and those who are
24 entirely homebound.

25 We ask that the city seizes this opportunity to
adapt these programs so they can continue to meet the

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2 needs of older adults who are living very different
3 realities than when these programs were created
4 decades ago. We will be submitting our longer
5 written testimony as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

8 COUNSEL: And that concludes our in-person
9 panels. We'll be now moving on to folks testifying
10 via Zoom.

11 Our first panel will be Kevin Jones from AARP,
12 Nicholas Buess from Food Bank for New York City, Dr.
13 Cynthia Mauer from Visiting Neighbors, Eleonora
14 Amaya, and Hannah Tager from WYNN. And so, our... we
15 will start with Kevin Jones.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 MR. JONES: Good afternoon Chairs Hudson and
18 Mealy, and the members of City Council Committee on
19 Aging. My name is Kevin Jones. I'm the Associate
20 State Director of Advocacy at AARP New York, which
21 represents 750,000 members across New York City.

22 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
23 Earlier this year, AARP New York released the first
24 ever blueprint for action filled with recommendations
25 to help city officials address top challenges among

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2 older New York City residents. One of the top
3 challenges we identified in this report is food
4 insecurity. Even prior to the pandemic food
5 insecurity was growing issue among the 50-plus
6 workers that we communicated, with an estimatee of
7 21% of older adults in New York City live in poverty
8 and have to make tough choices like paying rent or
9 buying food, and black, Latino and Asian American New
10 Yorkers are even more likely to experience food
11 insecurity and hunger. Now these same older adults
12 are dealing with the impacts of inflation, which has
13 resulted in rapidly increasing food prices making it
14 even harder for older adults to put food on the
15 table.

16 Older Adult Centers are a lifeline for these
17 older adults serving and delivering meals. We must
18 do more to support them. Senior Centers provide food
19 delivery services to homebound older adults as well
20 as grab-and-go meals that are essential to many
21 residents. Before the pandemic roughly 1 million New
22 York City residents were food insecure, including one
23 in 10 Older New Yorkers. That number has spiked to
24 2.2 million or roughly 25% of the population, really

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2 stressing that food insecurity is a clear and urgent
3 crisis in the city.

4 Last year, the city increased the reimbursement
5 rates for meals. But with inflation, it's likely the
6 increase was offset by rising prices. Older Adult
7 Centers need more funding for meals and more support
8 in general. Specifically, we're asking the city to
9 expand the city's funding allocated for home-
10 delivered meals programs, to ensure that more
11 eligible older New Yorkers can access two meals per
12 day seven days per week with culturally-appropriate
13 food options, and increase the per meal reimbursement
14 rate for meal providers, given that the city's
15 funding currently does not cover the cost of these
16 meals.

17 Given that half of older adults from the city or
18 foreign born. We also call on the city to assess the
19 demand for culturally competent meals for congregate
20 and home-delivered meals and then make a plan to meet
21 this demand. Finally, we joined LiveOn New York in
22 calling on the city to support new models for
23 services including Grab-and-go meals.

24 I'm going to be submitting a slightly longer and
25 more detailed testimony in writing but I'm happy to

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2 take any questions and thank you for the opportunity
3 to testify.

4 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you so much. Please
5 submit your testimony.

6 MR. JONES: Yes ma'am.

7 COUNSEL: Alright. Thank you and we're moving on
8 to Nicolas. Nicolas Buess.

9 MR. BUSS: Good morning. Hello, Chairs Hudson
10 and Mealy. I'm Nick Buess from the Food Bank for New
11 York City. I'm the Director of Government Relations
12 here. Food Bank has provided nutritious and
13 culturally appropriate meals to New Yorkers for 40
14 years. We serve about 700 community programs with
15 food deliveries from our 90,000 square foot warehouse
16 in the South Bronx, and we partner with hundreds of
17 community organizations to provide additional
18 services, including the city's largest free income
19 tax preparation program, SNAP assistance, and
20 nutrition education. We also directly operate in
21 older adults program at our community kitchen in West
22 Harlem. So we deeply appreciate the important role
23 that Older Adult Centers play in providing community
24 programming and nutritious meals. Last year at that

1 site alone, we served 1.2 million meals to older
2 adults to our food pantry.
3

4 We know that SNAP is the first line of defense
5 against hunger. Among households in New York City
6 with one or more seniors half rely on SNAP, yet
7 hundreds of thousands of eligible older New Yorkers
8 don't participate. As some folks have discussed
9 already, that may be because people are unaware that
10 the program exists, or that benefits that they claim
11 would take away from others especially children
12 (which to be clear would not). When SNAP benefits
13 are insufficient or unavailable, many seek assistance
14 through our Emergency Food Network. Most of the
15 network or not Older Adult Centers. They are food
16 pantries and soup kitchens which are open to the
17 public.

18 A recent survey revealed that nearly 90% of our
19 network is serving a high percentage of older adults.
20 So what that means is that the Emergency Food Network
21 has become the de facto backstop against hunger for
22 older adults in New York City. Many of our partners
23 serve seniors with special distribution hours, or are
24 providing home-delivered groceries. During the
25 pandemic public and private investment in emergency

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2 food increased. These supports were essential and
3 helped us meet spiking need, but today those
4 emergency resources are gone. Yet the lines at our
5 food pantries remain just as long. In the face of
6 barriers to accessing SNAP and a reliance on
7 emergency food, it's not surprising but deeply
8 concerning that the Census Bureau reports the poverty
9 among older adults as growing. Older adults have
10 been left out of essential national anti-poverty
11 measures including the Child Tax and Earned Income
12 Tax credits. New York City has the opportunity,
13 however, to invest in assistance for older adults,
14 and we applaud Councilmember and General Welfare
15 Chair Diana Ayala for her leadership and pushing New
16 York State to create a grocery benefit for older
17 adults that is regardless of immigration status.

18 So as the city looks to additional solutions to
19 address poverty among older adults, we urge the city
20 to leverage and invest in the services of the
21 Emergency Food Network including capacity support for
22 special services to older adults. Food Bank for New
23 York City will continue, and we thank you for your
24 continued advocacy.

25 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you so much.

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2 COUNSEL: Thank you, we're going to be moving on
3 to Dr. Cynthia Maurer.

4 DR. MAURER: Hello, thank you For this a
5 wonderful opportunity to give a voice to a population
6 that is not able to get to Older Adult Centers. The
7 seniors that I'm referring to are amongst the oldest
8 adults. Visiting Neighbors helps anyone over the age
9 of 60. But the vast majority of our clients are over
10 the age of 89 or 90. In fact, that's our average
11 age. And we have 18 seniors who are going to be 100
12 very soon. So our population is definitely getting
13 older. And people coming in for help are people who
14 are older. We had a 102-year-old yesterday who asked
15 for help for the first time. She said, "I didn't
16 need you before. And now I need you."

17 We are here on the front lines in a different
18 way, in that we are basically utilizing volunteers to
19 provide amazing services to these these seniors who
20 need us. Most of our people are alone, most of our
21 people do not have family or friends to turn to
22 because they may not live here, or because they lost
23 family and friends through the years. And they're
24 pretty much all by themselves. And food insecurity
25 is a huge issue. But there... it is such an intense

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1 concern, not only about the food itself, but the
2 issues surrounding the food. A lot of seniors
3 sometimes are so depressed they don't want to eat,
4 and they don't necessarily look towards eating, or
5 take care of themselves nutrition wise. And we have
6 our volunteer serve as these eyes and ears in the
7 community, doing what we need them to do that report
8 back to us.
9

10 If we have a senior who is depressed or sad, we
11 work with them and talk to them about what's really
12 going on to try to get them to eat, as well as get
13 them access to shopping. Our volunteers have done
14 everything from stand in pantry lines, as well as go
15 to local restaurants who have donated extra food.
16 The volunteers will shop for or with the seniors.
17 Now that the pandemic is somewhat better -- I mean,
18 obviously, it's still going on, but it isn't as dire
19 in the same way in the very beginning, though people
20 are still dying -- seniors are terrified of going out
21 and had absolutely no access.

22 So our volunteers came through and they did all
23 kinds of things to be safe with seniors and went and
24 got them food. But now that they can get out again,
25 a lot of our seniors have found themselves incredibly

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2 isolated, in the sense that they were feeling a sense
3 of cabin fever, and wanted to go in to shops for
4 themselves but needed that arm to hold. So our
5 volunteers would escort them to and from safely to be
6 able to do their shopping, as well as encourage them
7 to eat it, as well as talk with them about
8 superfoods. We have a wonderful nursing program,
9 where the nurses will talk with our seniors about
10 dietary needs and restrictions. And what are the
11 concerns?

12 Ultimately, we're here to keep a population out
13 of...

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time expired.

15 DR. MAURER: Thank you. And I just want to say,
16 we are so appreciative of the City Council. You are
17 our champions. You really are I don't know what we
18 would do without you. And I don't know what our
19 city's seniors would do without you. Thank you for
20 helping us continue to do what we do and keep our
21 people independent, active and as safe as possible
22 and healthy and fed. Bye.

23 COUNCILMEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

24

25

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2 COUNSEL: Thank you. So we have a few people who
3 aren't logged in. So we're actually going to move on
4 to MJ Okma from Sage. MJ? Are you on?

5 MR. OKMA: Good afternoon and thank you Chairs
6 Mealy and Hudson for organizing this important
7 oversight hearing. My name is MJ Okma with Sage, the
8 country's first and largest organization dedicated to
9 improving the lives of LGBTQ+ and HIV affected older
10 people.

11 In New York City Sage runs a network of Older
12 Adult Centers, and is the onsite service provider in
13 New York's first LGBTQ+ affordable elder housing
14 developments which are located in Brooklyn and the
15 graphics. LGBTQ+ elders face higher rates of social
16 isolation, poverty, and lack of access to culturally
17 competent services and support all of which leads to
18 disproportionate rates of hunger. These conditions
19 have all been exaggerated by inflation and the
20 ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The result is LGBTQ+
21 elders are 60% more likely to experience food
22 insecurity than their non LGBTQ+ peers. And isolated
23 rates are even higher for transgender elders and
24 LGBTQ+ elders of color.

25

2 We must take steps to address the unique needs
3 and challenges facing LGBTQ+ older New Yorkers that
4 lead to this food insecurity. I want to echo the
5 recommendations outlined by LiveOn New York here and
6 focus my testimony today on the need for the support
7 of new models of service including grab-and-go meals.

8 While the grab-and-go meal program was created as
9 an emergency response at the start of the COVID-19
10 pandemic, it has proven to be a vital resource for
11 our community members. This program has been
12 especially important for participants in our Sage
13 Positive program, which serves older Yorkers with
14 HIV, including long term survivors.

15 New Yorkers aging with HIV have pronounced health
16 concerns and higher rates of food insecurity that
17 were addressed by this delivery model. It is
18 especially important to prioritize programs that
19 support New Yorkers aging with HIV, because by 2030
20 70% of New Yorkers living with HIV will be over the
21 age of 50. So this is a rapidly growing population.

22 While we certainly understand the importance and
23 impact of congregate meals, we strongly recommend
24 that the grab-and-go model is also preserved. We
25 also ask that discretionary funding to DFTA provides

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2 more flexibility outside of DFTA's standard expense
3 contract template. This change would be able to
4 support recent fresh food pantries that we have
5 piloted at our Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem centers.
6 These pilot programs have resulted in lines wrapping
7 around the block and have been proving to be a
8 strongly effective way to connect LGBTQ+ elders to
9 fresh produce. This is especially important for
10 elders who live in food deserts and are unable to
11 travel outside of their neighborhood to do their food
12 shopping.

13 Again, thank you for holding this important
14 hearing and providing me the opportunity to testify.
15 We look forward to working with the city and the City
16 Council to address food insecurity among LGBTQ+ and
17 HIV affected older workers.

18 COUNSEL: Thank you. Alright, we're going to be
19 moving on to our second zoom panel. And so we'll
20 have Shaaranya Pillai from India Home. Bonnie
21 Lumagui, Jeremy Kaplan from Encore Community
22 Services, Tania Collazo from JASA, and Michelle
23 Rodriguez from University Settlement Society. We
24 will be starting with Shaaranya .

25

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3 MS. PILLAI: Thank you. Thank you Chair Hudson,
4 Chair Mealy, City Council Committee on Aging and
5 Subcommittee on Older Adults and Food Insecurity for
6 this opportunity today. I'm testing on behalf of
7 India Home the largest organization dedicated to New
8 York's South Asian older adults through culturally
9 competent older adult programs.

10 We're in six locations across queens in Jamaica,
11 Ozone Park, Flushing, Kew Gardens, Elmherst, and
12 Jamaica estates. We get anywhere from 200 to 300
13 older adults per week at our centers. Our food
14 programs have been a huge trusted component of our
15 services from our inception. We've served nearly
16 200,000 meals to our older adults, cater to their
17 diverse South Asian diets, whether they're
18 Bangladeshi Muslims, Gujarati, Hindu vegetarians,
19 Jain vegetarians or Indo-Guyanese Hindus. It's been
20 core to our mission that our programs filled a gap in
21 cultural competence that conventional older adult
22 programs had lacked from the get-go. Research had
23 shown that South Asian older adults had already been
24 food insecure prior to the pandemic, and a needs
25 assessment we conducted in 2017 showed that having
access to food and groceries was New York South Asian

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2 older adults highest financial concern. When the
3 pandemic first hit in a time of absolute crisis,
4 India Home maintained our dedication and pivoted to
5 provide home-delivered meals and groceries that we
6 had never done before, while still ensuring cultural
7 competence in what we serve. For 10 to 20% of our
8 clients, this was the meal they relied on as their
9 only nutritious meal for the day.

10 Culturally competent meals truly make or break
11 programming for the older adults we serve. They
12 require ingredients and dishes they are comfortable
13 with, and partnerships with caterers that are not
14 only familiar, but proficient and well-versed with
15 their cultural palates, while upholding our clients
16 health and interests through nutritious choices.

17 We have been entrusted in selecting those
18 partners that have been best-suited to meet the needs
19 of our older adults. The budget that we receive for
20 culturally competent meals that we serve at our six
21 centers is not sufficient to meet the actual costs.
22 Our food is tailored to the diverse communities we
23 serve, who have very diverse palates. Our meals are
24 large driving factor for bringing our older adults to
25 the center which we know that DFTA wants. However,

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2 have the annual meal costs incurred at our older
3 adult centers, which is our organization's biggest
4 expense, 20% has to be covered through other sources
5 of funding.

6 At the beginning of the fiscal year, we know that
7 DFTA emphasized to have in-person congregate meals
8 without allowing grab-and-go. Our sites are in six
9 different locations. They're in mosques, Hindu
10 temples, other community centers, which helped to get
11 our services to be more accessible. Some of these
12 locations are smaller with limited seating space for
13 consumption of congregate meals.

14 I don't need to say COVID-19 is very much still a
15 concern for our older adults with spikes in our own
16 neighborhoods and communities, and cases increasing
17 as we speak. We need for all city agencies to be on
18 the same page, we need the agencies to be adaptive
19 and realistic to the needs demonstrated by our
20 communities and holding our clients safety as utmost
21 importance. With COVID numbers increasing, there are
22 clients that do not want to eat at the center, and
23 rightfully so. In crowded programming spaces where
24 they want to engage in the programming safely with
25

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2 masks, mandating them to eat in that same space is
3 insensitive to their health and well being.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, Tom inspired.

5 MS. PILLAI: Oh, man. Sorry about that. As the
6 commissioner, life is not the same and will never be
7 the same. We can't force upon our life affirming
8 programs and methods that are not appropriate for the
9 current reality. We need consideration of the Grab-
10 and-go program on a long term basis, if not
11 consistently throughout the year with the option to
12 wax and wane as per the season in which we're seeing
13 the highest cases of COVID. And we need the
14 financial support from DFTA to support these methods.
15 We need you know more funding per meal, acknowledging
16 the higher costs of culturally competent meals. We
17 can't afford to be tone deaf and leave any senior
18 behind. It is imperative that we do not just deny
19 our South Asian older adults the access to quality,
20 culturally competent food that they deserve. Thank
21 you for the opportunity to testify today.

22 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you, and you can submit
23 the full testimony in writing. Thank you.

24 COUNSEL: Thank you. We're moving on to Bonnie
25 Lumagui. Bonnie, if you're on?

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2 MS. LUMAGUI: Hi. Thank you. My name is Bonnie
3 Lumagui. And I'm the Assistant Executive Director of
4 Senior Services and Community Services at Hamilton
5 Madison House. In Chinatown on the Lower East Side,
6 and increasingly in neighborhoods throughout the
7 city, in particular, the subject of this hearing,
8 serving to seniors and addressing food insecurity.
9 And we applaud the Subcommittee for focusing on this
10 crucial subject and we appreciate the opportunity to
11 provide input.

12 Since the onset of COVID, as many of us have
13 testified today, we are concerned about barriers to
14 access to healthy and affordable food among seniors,
15 and we have assembled at HMH to be partners and
16 volunteers regularly conducting food pantries and
17 providing home delivered food packages to seniors
18 residing in public housing. We have found that the
19 need for visits, even with the relaxation of COVID
20 restrictions. This spring we launched a youth-run
21 Farmers Market at Alfred E Smith public housing in
22 Chinatown in partnership with upstate New York based
23 Norwich Meadows Farm, and the organization focused on
24 market which supports farmers statewide. Within the
25 cultures of local residents, we've been serving bok

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2 choy, salad greens, eggs, spinach, and let's not
3 forget corn. They're very excited about their corn.
4 These items are reasonably priced and we accept all
5 forms of payment via EBT and Green Box. The
6 initiative gained popularity as the season progressed
7 and we typically serve more than 200 customers per
8 day on Sundays, the majority of them seniors who have
9 been especially grateful for the opportunity, and
10 often arrive an hour before opening to take their
11 places in line, and secure purchase of the items of
12 their choices. The farmers market was slated to
13 close in September. Due to demand we kept it running
14 through December, and on days and inclement weather
15 we were inside our community center.

16 Presently we are seeking funds to keep the market
17 going on a year-round basis whereby seniors from our
18 NORCs will receive weekly deliveries of boxes of
19 fresh produce. Our plan is to also assist qualified
20 seniors in enrolling in SNAP, thereby allowing them
21 to receive food at a 50% discount to the benefit
22 available through New York City Department of Health
23 and Mental Health.

24 We welcome the support and partnership, and we'd
25 be grateful to be helpful in encouraging the

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2 adaptation of these practices more broadly citywide,
3 and we thank you again.

4 On a side note, I do want to add, we also run our
5 City Hall Senior Center in lower Manhattan, and we
6 are fortunate enough to have put grab-and-go into our
7 contract. I do want to point out that grab-and-go
8 has not impacted. We are seeing pre-pandemic levels
9 in our groups in our activities. We are very
10 concerned, if it was decided that even though we do
11 have it in our contract that we couldn't do it in
12 ongoing capacity, that would limit who's coming
13 because as it was already mentioned, they were
14 they...

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

16 MS. LUMAGUI: ...where they can mask, they will
17 come. Where they don't feel they can mask they do
18 not feel comfortable, and eating in a group is where
19 they can't mask. So I think it's really important to
20 point out that difference. Thank you again.

21 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.

22 COUNSEL: Thank you. We're moving on to Jeremy
23 Kaplan. Jeremy?

24

25

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2 MR. KAPLAN: Hi, good afternoon Chairs Mealy and
3 Hudson, and thank you so much for allowing us to
4 continue to testify virtually. I know that made it
5 possible for me to be here today. My name is Jeremy
6 Kaplan, I'm the Executive Director of Encore
7 Community Services. Between our flagship center and
8 our robust home-delivered meal program between 14th
9 Street and 110 Street, Encore provides around 1500
10 meals a day to older adults. The majority of those
11 meals are scratch cooked in our very own kitchen.
12 And we were also responsible for facilitating about
13 two thirds of the city's Recovery Meals Program.

14 I want to start off by acknowledging that there
15 have been many positive developments in the past year
16 regarding meals for older adults, and we are grateful
17 for all of those involved in making those shifts
18 happen. The reimbursement rate increases have been
19 extremely impactful, and the RFP to invest in
20 capacity building for kitchens within NYC Aging
21 Network will also surely help to improve the quality
22 within the system.

23 That said the city is failing to reckon with at
24 least two major issues: We know that the city of New
25 York is not providing meals to every older adult that

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2 might be eligible for those services. Providers are
3 still stretched thin, facing high turnover in low
4 wage jobs with lack of critical capital funds. To
5 expand our operations. We talked a lot about
6 utilization today. These issues of underfunding or
7 staff positions in particular and capital needs are
8 highly affecting the network's ability to meet
9 utilization goals. I believe there should be a more
10 expansive outreach strategy to potential home-
11 delivered meal clients throughout the city who we are
12 not yet currently reaching. But even if there were
13 we would not be able to absorb the dramatic increase
14 that we'd see with the current funding levels.

15 There is a gulf between who we are currently
16 serving and serving and who we could help and it will
17 only continue to grow as the demographics continue to
18 rapidly shift, as we all know that they are. But
19 perhaps the biggest problem that we see as a city is
20 that we seem to have decided that only one meal a day
21 is acceptable when providing older adults who have
22 been evaluated and deemed among the most vulnerable
23 members of our community. Every single provider in
24 this network has heard stories and has data to show
25 that clients who we are currently serving, they are

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2 stretching these meals to two and three meals a day,
3 we are not providing them what they need
4 nutritionally with the one meal a day.

5 For older adults who are medically fragile and
6 either already facing or at risk for cognitive
7 decline, going hungry is devastating to their overall
8 well-being. Everyone deserves to be fully fed, but
9 these folks rely on us bringing them food so we have
10 to do better by them. I recognize that what I'm
11 talking about here will require a major investment
12 and shift in policy.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 MR. KAPLAN: As you said, Chair Hudson, DFTA is
15 the lowest funded agency in the city of New York and
16 it is absolutely atrocious. We should be ashamed of
17 that when looking at our budget. I look forward to
18 seeing increased investments, and thank you to this
19 Committee for all of your support in our work.

20 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.

21 COUNSEL: Thank you. We're going to move on to
22 Tania Collazo.

23 MS. COLLAZO: (inaudible) Hudson and Mealy and
24 members of the Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on

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2 Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for hosting
3 today's important meeting.

4 JASA welcomes today's oversight hearing on food
5 insecurity among older adults. My name is Tania
6 Collazo and I'm the Associate Director of Care and
7 Case Management Nutrition Services. JASA is a not-
8 for-profit agency that honors older New Yorkers as
9 vital members of society, providing services for over
10 50 years that support aging with purpose and
11 partnering to build strong communities. JASA has a
12 comprehensive integrated network of services that
13 provide a continuum of community-based care in the
14 Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. Programming
15 promotes independence, safety, wellness, community
16 participation and an enhanced quality of life for New
17 York City's older adults. These programs reach over
18 40,000 clients and include affordable senior housing,
19 homecare and a wide range of social services which
20 include case management, Older Adult Centers, NORC
21 supportive services, home-delivered meals, caregiver
22 support, mental health, advocacy, legal services, and
23 adult protective and guardianship services. JASA's
24 home-delivered meals program, Older Adult Centers,
25 and other special food initiatives provide older

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2 adults living with food insecurity several pathways
3 to access meal safely, including hot meals and grab-
4 and-go meals. Our Older Adult Centers and home-
5 delivered meals program has provided 1.1 million
6 meals annually. In addition to home-delivered meals
7 JASA has NORC and Case Management Programs across the
8 borough's that have the ability to assess and assist
9 clients in obtaining meal service.

10 During the height of the pandemic, JASA, in
11 collaboration with other community partners and key
12 stakeholders provided special pandemic relief to
13 clients including residents of JASA's housing
14 developments. JASA's programs work closely with food
15 pantries and either provide monthly pantry days at
16 the NORCs and/or OACs, or refer clients to food
17 pantries in their areas. New York City Aging
18 reportedly distributed approximately 40,000 Farmers
19 Market coupon booklets this year with coupon booklets
20 that total \$25 each. The coupons are very well
21 received. During the spring holidays of Easter and
22 Passover each year, JASA provides clients access to
23 special holiday funds to help with purchase of
24 appropriate foods for holiday.

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2 We provide clients with nutrition education in
3 multiple ways. The first is through the JASA Cooks
4 Initiative. The goal is to educate clients on
5 nutrition that can help to optimize their health and
6 well-being. Our NORCs and Older Adult Centers work
7 with consultants and JASA's Health Services team to
8 provide chronic disease self-management programs.
9 We've launched a partnership with Plant Powered Metro
10 New York, a community based organization committed to
11 educating the public on the benefits of plant based
12 nutrition on health outcomes.

13 Finally, JASA would like to express our deep
14 appreciation to the New York City Council and the
15 administration for investing in meal vehicles in the
16 fiscal year 22 budget. We're very thankful for that.
17 This funding will ensure the delivery of safe and
18 healthy meals to clients. This investment and the
19 continued support for home-delivered meals is
20 critical to the sustainability and food security of
21 vulnerable New Yorkers. JASA is pleased to serve as
22 a resource for any additional information on food
23 insecurity among older New Yorkers, older adults in
24 New York. Thank you very much for the opportunity to
25 testify today.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you so much.

3 COUNSEL: Thank you. Moving on to... Is
4 Michelle Rodriguez logged in? Michelle Rodriguez?

5 Alright, moving on to Eleonora Amaya? Eleonora?
6 Okay. Hannah Tager? And Helen On? Okay. Seeing
7 that none of those folks are logged in. Is there
8 anyone we might have inadvertently missed? Anyone
9 who has not testified who wishes to that is logged
10 in.

11 Oh, I see that Michelle raised her hand.

12 Alright. Michelle? Michelle Rodriguez? Michelle,
13 are you muted? Michelle, if you could accept unmute,
14 please.

15 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Can you hear me?

16 COUNSEL: Yes.

17 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Hi, sorry about that. I would
18 like to thank everyone for the opportunity to
19 testify. My name is Michelle Rodriguez. I am the
20 Program Director for the Meals on Wheels Program, the
21 Neighborhood Center, and the Meltzer Center at
22 University Settlements on the Lower East Side.
23 Across Manhattan Brooklyn, University Settlement
24 provides early childhood and youth programs, mental
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2 health, and eviction prevention programs, as well as
3 older adult programs.

4 On the lower east side, we continue to see the
5 impact of older adults experiencing food insecurity.

6 We run two monthly food pantries, one at Meltzer
7 Center and the other one at the Neighborhood Center.

8 And as inflation has driven prices up participation

9 in our food pantries has exploded. Pre-COVID, we

10 regularly would have 90 participants coming to our

11 monthly food pantry distribution, and now we see

12 almost 200 people at both of our sites. That's 200

13 each.

14 Our food pantry distribution starts at nine and

15 we see participants lining up by 5 am. And sometimes

16 the night before pantry distribution some

17 participants lock their carts to the fence to save

18 their spot in line, because there's immense anxiety

19 in the line over the weather everyone will be able to

20 get food. And sometimes this anxiety can turn into

21 anger at other participants.

22 At our neighborhood center on Allen Street, we

23 provide hot meals to an average of 75 to about 85

24 older adults from Monday to Friday, and we can share

25

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heartbreaking stories about how our older adults need more food support.

We serve a hot breakfast and we ask for a voluntary contribution, which is you know, part of our DFTA contract. We recently had to raise our contribution from 50 cents to \$1 to cover our rising food costs, and then we saw a significant loss of members eating breakfast with us. One couple went from buying two breakfasts to splitting one in between the two of them. And our older adults cannot afford this additional 50 cents for breakfast. And while the contribution is voluntary, many participants feel too self-conscious to be in line and not contribute.

We've had participants asking to buy an additional lunch to take home for dinner. And, you know, that presents other issues because of our head count and the way DFTA counts participants. So participants have gotten creative and started buying meals for friends or relatives at home or spouses and so that they can have an extra meal to take home with them.

We need to ensure that our older adults have access to healthy and affordable food in a dignified

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way. And some ways that we can support our older adults facing food insecurity are we need healthier, healthier food options for distribution. Our food bags at our pantry primarily consists of canned foods, which they don't eat. Our participants want and deserve fresh produce, fresh fruits and vegetables, and we can receive funding to purchase more wholesale fresh produce from our vendors, which we would then distribute to our participants. And if there was flexibility in our contracts to allow participants to buy multiple meals, including Meals On Wheels. Many of our Meals On Wheels, participants as well claimed that they're still hungry because there's just one meal per day.

We need to do more to support our aging communities in New York City when it comes to food access, and I we all appreciate the council's time to hold this hearing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Thank you.

COUNSEL: Alright, thank you. And then at this time, if there's anyone else who wishes to testify whose name has not been called yet, please use the zoom raise hand function.

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2 Seeing no hands, I will turn it back to the
3 Chairs for closing statements.

4 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: I just wanted to thank
5 everyone for coming, and video conferencing this
6 important meeting. I'm looking forward to continued
7 advocacy from everyone. This population is so much
8 in need. And I heard so many different things today
9 that, I know what I have to do in regards to making
10 it better so that when I get older, I have a good
11 time with food. Thank you. I'm turning it over to
12 my colleague for last words.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much Chair
14 Mealy. And thank you to everyone who's testified
15 today, including the Commissioner and members of the
16 administration. Food insecurity is something that we
17 know has existed for a very long time but was likely
18 exacerbated during the pandemic, and it's incumbent
19 upon all of us to make sure that we continue to
20 allocate the resources and the funding needed so that
21 organizations, like so many of the ones that have
22 testified today, can continue to support older adults
23 and all of their needs. So thank you all for your
24 testimony again, and this meeting is adjourned.

25 [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date 12/22/2022