

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE
ON AGING

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March 10, 2021
Start: 10:04 a.m.
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing, Virtual Room 2

B E F O R E: Margaret S. Chin
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Margaret S. Chin
Diana Ayala
Chaim Deutsch
Ruben Diaz, Sr.
Mathieu Eugene
Mark Treyger
Paul Vallone
Helen K. Rosenthal
Farah N. Louis

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

Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez
Commissioner
Department for the Aging

Jose Mercado
Chief Financial Officer
Department for the Aging

Katelyn Andrews

Tara Klein

Beth Finkel

Molly Krakowski

Melissa Sklarz

Ravi Reddi

Rhonda Soberman

Rachel Sherrow

Kimberly George

Olivia Cothren

Dr. Cynthia Maurer

Bing Ji

Wesley Davis

Wendell Walters

@

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording has
3 started.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Cloud recording is
5 good.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Backup is rolling.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. And
9 Sergeant Lugo, would you be able to start with your
10 opening statement.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS LUGO: Good morning,
12 everyone. Welcome to the New York City Council
13 fiscal year 2022 preliminary budget hearing of the
14 Committee on Aging. At this time would all panelists
15 please turn on your video. To minimize disruption,
16 please place all electronic devices to vibrate or
17 silent. If you wish to submit testimony you may do
18 so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
19 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
20 cooperation. Chair Chin, we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: [gavel] Good morning.
22 I'm Council Member Margaret Chin, chair of the
23 Committee on Aging, and I thank you for joining us
24 today, ah, for the hearing on the fiscal year 2022
25 preliminary budget and 2021 preliminary Mayor's

1
2 Management Report. I also wanted to thank, ah,
3 welcome to all the advocates and community members
4 who's watching this live stream, and welcome back to
5 Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez of the Department for the
6 Aging. We are also joined by committee member,
7 Council Member R. Diaz, Jr., and other council
8 member, ah, I guess will be joining shortly and we
9 will announce them, um, when they join us. In
10 today's, ah, preliminary budget hearing we will hear
11 testimony from the Department for the Aging, also
12 known as DFTA, on its proposed 383.5 million dollar
13 budget for fiscal year 2022. We will also discuss
14 DFTA's operation and performance indicators from the
15 2021 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, or PMMR.
16 Just over a year ago we met for a similar preliminary
17 budget hearing in City Council chambers. Within a
18 week much of New York City was shut down, beginning a
19 long descent into to the depth of the COVID-19
20 pandemic. Today we are lucky to have effective
21 vaccine that are still being rolled out to seniors,
22 and the prospect of new federal relief totaling 12.5
23 billion to the state and 6 billion to the city.
24 Despite these positive steps, senior centers have
25 remained closed for in-person activity since March

2020, even as amusement park make plans to reopen.

The preliminary budget includes no new needs or new investment like technology, meals, or senior centers, nor does it reflect federal revenue from the December 2020 stimulus or the potential March 2021 stimulus.

The new stimulus bill contains 1.4 billions in funding for older American act programs. In the fiscal 2022 preliminary budget senior center funding totals 173 million, which fall short of 10 million of the administration's previous commitment to seniors.

I would like to hear how DFTA senior center budget support the cost of reopening center and how it has the resource to deal with the high the heightened nutrition, mental health, and health needs of seniors post COVID. I continue to believe, as I wrote to the department in October, that DFTA should formally postpone its planned senior center RFP to deal with these programs and budget issues. With billions in new federal funding coming to the New York the administration must keep its promise to add the 10 million for senior center and refit the system only once centers are open and have the necessary resource. Home-delivered meal and GetFoodNYC are also an important matter in today's hearing.

1
2 Provider estimate that the need for home-delivered
3 meals has grown by at least 20% to 30% during the
4 pandemic. There are also 777 or more seniors who are
5 eligible for DFTA's home-delivered meal, but are
6 currently placed in Sanitation's GetFood program
7 instead of DFTA as provider. I look forward to
8 hearing how DFTA intends to ensure no senior goes
9 without a healthy and nutritious meal and how much is
10 budgeted to meet the actual need for home-delivered
11 meals moving forward. Turning to DFTA's fiscal 2022
12 preliminary capital budget, there are no new capital
13 appropriation in the next two years, which hamper's
14 the department's ability to plan for growth in the
15 diverse New York senior population. This is
16 important for the future of the system given that the
17 department's analysis show how 29 of the city's 59
18 community district needs senior center expansion.
19 Despite these challenges, there is no doubt that the
20 past year has shown how hard DFTA staff, the
21 nonprofit providers, and seniors are working every
22 day to stay healthy and connected, and I would like
23 to thank the Commissioner for her service throughout
24 the pandemic. This is my final of eight budget as
25 the chair of the Committee on Aging, and I look

1 forward to working together with DFTA to build on
2 previous investment. By working together I believe
3 we can develop the senior services of the future as
4 we emerge from this COVID-19 pandemic. Before we
5 swear in the commissioner I'd like to thank the
6 committee staff for their hard work in preparing for
7 this hearing. Senior finance, finance analyst Daniel
8 Croup, unit head Dohemy Sapora, committee counsel
9 Nusak Tadori, ah, senior legislative policy analyst
10 Kalima Johnson, my director of legislation and
11 budget, ah, Conor Irvine, and my legislative
12 associate Angela Seger. Ah, we also have been
13 joined, ah, by Council Member Ayala. So I would
14 like, now like to turn it over to our committee
15 senior legislative policy analyst Kalima Johnson, who
16 will review some of the procedural items relating to
17 today's hearing. Thank you.

19 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair Chin. I am
20 Kalima Johnson, senior legislative policy analyst to
21 the Aging Committee of the New York City Council. I
22 will be moderating today's hearing and calling on
23 panelists to testify. Before we begin testimony, I
24 want to remind everyone that you will be on mute
25 until you are called on to testify. After you are

1 called on, you will be unmuted. I will be calling on
2 witnesses to testify in panels, so please listen for
3 your name to be called. I will be announcing in
4 advance who the next panel will be. I would like to
5 remind everyone that unlike our typical council
6 hearings, while you will be placed on a panel, I will
7 be calling individuals to testify one at a time.
8 Council members who have questions for a particular
9 panelist should use the Zoom raise hand function.
10 You will be called on in the order in which your
11 hands are raised after the full panel has completed
12 testimony. We will be limiting council member
13 questions to five minutes. This includes both
14 questions and answers. Please note that for the
15 purposes of this virtual hearing we will not be
16 allowing for a second round of questioning. But,
17 panelists, once your name is called a member of our
18 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will
19 give you the go ahead to begin after setting the
20 time. Please listen for that cue. All public
21 testimony will be limited to three minutes. At the
22 end of the three minutes please wrap up your comments
23 so we can move to the next panelist. Please listen
24 carefully and wait for the sergeant to announce that
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1
2 you may begin before delivering your testimony as
3 there is a slight delay. I will now call on the
4 following members of the administration to testify
5 and answer questions: Commissioner Lorraine Cortes-
6 Vazquez from the Department for the Aging and Jose
7 Mercado, DFTA's chief financial officer. I will
8 further read the oath and after I will call on you to
9 respond. Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez, do you affirm
10 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
11 the truth before this committee and to respond
12 honestly to council member questions?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ I do.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you. Mr. Mercado, do
15 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
16 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
17 respond honestly to council member questions?

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I do.

19 MODERATOR: Thank you. Commissioner,
20 thank you, Commissioner. You may begin when ready.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you
22 so much. Um, I'm having technical difficulties, so I
23 hope that I could make it through my testimony and
24 through the questions and answers. Ah, good morning,
25 good morning, ah, Chairwoman Chin, Chair Dromm, and

1 members of the Aging and Finance Committees. I was
2 moved, ah, I was moved, Chairwoman Chin, when you
3 said this was your last budget hearing. This, too,
4 will probably be my last budget hearing, so, ah, this
5 is, this is an important one for both of us. Um, as
6 you know, I'm Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez. I'm the
7 commissioner of the Department for the Aging. I've
8 joined, I'm joined this morning by Jose Mercado, our
9 chief financial officers. I will do my best to
10 answer all your questions, and, and Jose is, is quite
11 adept at providing the details that I always, ah, um,
12 I fail at. So he will provide all of the financial
13 details. Ah, thank you for the opportunity to
14 discuss DFTA's preliminary budget for fiscal year,
15 ah, 2022. In addition to working to eliminate agism,
16 which we continue and I'm happy to announce that
17 there will be a campaign later on, ah, in the next
18 few weeks, ah, ensuring, and ensuring the dignity and
19 quality of life for older New Yorkers and providing
20 high-quality services and the resources are DFTA's
21 top priorities. To support this important work, our
22 FY22 preliminary budget projects 383.6 million
23 dollars in funding, of which 264.8 million dollars is
24 city funds, which includes an allocation of 173.4
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1 million dollars to support older adult centers,
2 commonly known as senior centers, and 41.8 million
3 for home-delivered meals, and another, ah, 38 million
4 for case management, with another 34.4 million in
5 support of home care for homebound older adults who
6 are not Medicaid eligible, 8 million for NORC
7 programs, and 8.1 million for caregiver services. In
8 addition to supporting these services, the
9 administration has invested heavily in responding to
10 the continued pandemic. Through the support and
11 advocacy of important stakeholders, many of who will
12 be testifying today, we are also, we have also
13 advanced many of our efforts to hold, ah, to help
14 older New Yorkers in the midst of this pandemic.
15 These have been nine-and-a-half months that none of
16 us would have ever imagined at the last budget
17 hearing and the impact that that has had on services,
18 on our providers, but most importantly on older
19 adults and their families has been incredible, ah,
20 and unprecedented. Some notable successes, though,
21 despite this pandemic, there has been opportunity
22 and, um, and growth. Ah, some notable successes
23 include a pivot to online services with 259 centers
24 providing such services since March 2020 to January,
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1 offering 87,000 sessions. Many of them are exciting,
2 creative, and innovative, and it has been able to
3 keep older adults in touch. A collaboration with the
4 New York City Housing Authority and the Mayor's
5 Office of the Chief Technology Office, ah, we were
6 able to provide 10,000 laptops, along with a year of
7 internet to older adults living in New York City
8 Housing Authority developments. We would, were able
9 to provide some training along with that, which has
10 proven to be tremendous. Case management clients
11 increased by the highest of annual amount for which
12 data are available, from 34,937 annually in FY19 to
13 40,347 in FY21, which is a 15% increase. In the
14 first half of FY20 our home-delivered meals served
15 just under 23,000 older adults daily. That
16 enrollment spiked to roughly 27 during the start of
17 the pandemic, but has returned back to just over 24
18 million, I mean, 24,000 individuals in the first six
19 months of FY21. Over 3.3 million wellness calls to
20 approximately 200,000 clients have been conducted
21 since March 2020, reducing social isolation,
22 providing important program information and updates,
23 and linking clients to vital services, resources, and
24 support. We're also incredibly grateful for the
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1 ongoing support of the City Council, which in FY21
2 awarded DFTA over 38.1 million dollars in
3 discretionary funding, allowing us to make even
4 greater investments in often underserved and unserved
5 communities. While recognizing all these important
6 external partnerships, I would be remiss not to
7 mention that this administration has over the years
8 consistently made investments in aging services,
9 including an overall increase of 100 million in
10 baseline funding to basically undo the erosion to
11 aging services that was done in the prior
12 administration. And that 100 million has basically
13 restored what was lost in the prior administration.
14 This last year has challenged us to do more with our
15 limited resources. But I continue to be proud of the
16 work that the DFTA, the DFTA staff, and particularly
17 the, ah, older adult network, ah, has done, such as,
18 um, and also other city agencies, such as the
19 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Vaccine
20 Command Center, New York City's Emergency Management,
21 and the Fire Department. All have been collaborating
22 to work and address the needs that have arisen during
23 this pandemic. Older adults are fundamental
24 stakeholders of the response of the pandemic. As
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1 such, DFTA has brought its lens and advocacy to our
2 sister agencies as they deepen their focus of older
3 adults. We appreciate this collaborations and look
4 forward to maintaining these strengthened
5 relationships even after the pandemic is behind us.
6 It has shown that together, ah, city agencies can
7 this make an age-friendly, safe city. Service
8 pivots, as you know, FY21 did not unfold the way we
9 initially planned. Starting three months into the
10 pandemic, which disproportionately impacts black,
11 brown, and Asian communities, as well as older
12 adults, DFTA and our providers had to quickly shift
13 our services. You've heard this in every other
14 hearing that we've had over the year. We had to
15 adapt to emerging needs while remaining, um, while
16 remaining accessible despite Executive Order 100.
17 This executive order mandated the closure of multiple
18 businesses throughout the city during the state of
19 emergency, including the closure of all older adult
20 congregate centers. Through these pivots we are all
21 reminded of the strength and the resilience, not only
22 of older New Yorkers and their families, while also
23 highlighting areas of need and further investment,
24 such as technology, ah, technology access, increased
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1 support for seniors who, and increased support for
2 seniors who choose to age in place. We also need
3 broadband in this city. DFTA services over the last
4 year, ah, with our providers, has transitioned
5 programs and services to be virtual and telephone
6 based. These include friendly visiting, geriatric
7 mental health, which has grown tremendously,
8 caregiver support, case management, and [inaudible]
9 webinars, and the development of new programming,
10 such as fraud prevention and empowerment series
11 through our Elder Justice group. This pandemic, as
12 many wonderful things as we've been able to get out
13 of it and learn from it, we also learned that
14 predators are on the rise every day and we needed to
15 strengthen our, ah, elder justice services. Virtual
16 programs provide older adults with flexibility to
17 join where they can at their convenience and not have
18 it interfere with their schedule. It was an
19 interesting learning. It fosters community
20 connection, wellness, and intellectual, creative, and
21 physical engagement. We are increasingly seeing the
22 value in this delivery method and are working on ways
23 to ensure that virtual programming continue post-
24 COVID to provide older adults with more choices and
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1 flexibility, and state-of-the-art programs regardless
2 of where they attend. Older adult centers, many of
3 which are offered some virtual programming, pivoted
4 quickly in order to increase virtual program
5 offerings in such areas as social engagement. Prior
6 to the pandemic 47 senior centers and sites
7 affiliated with those centers were providing virtual
8 programming. That number has grown throughout the
9 pandemic and as of this January 259 older adult
10 centers and their affiliated sites have offered over
11 87,000 sessions of free programming that includes
12 fitness classes, arts and crafts, music,
13 socialization programs via Zoom and other apps. As a
14 result, as a result, older adults now have a wider
15 range of options and fewer barriers to attend.
16 Centers are providing virtual program in over a dozen
17 languages. Virtual programming is one example of
18 adapting to a changing need for, for our older
19 adults. We've all learn more virtual programming and
20 Zoom meetings than any one of us ever anticipated in
21 our lifetime. We have learned the benefits of this
22 option and look forward to continuing to offer
23 increased, ah, virtual programming in the future. At
24 the start of the pandemic congregate meals of older
25

1 adults were transitioned to grab and go. It was a
2 good meal perversion, ah, of provision service. It
3 worked effectively. But then immediately after that
4 we saw the signs told that it was important for older
5 adults to stay at home, and then DFTA, NYC direct
6 meal delivery was imposed in, ah, March and in April
7 of, of 2020, resulting in a successful provision of
8 1.7 meals to older adults and 75% greater meal
9 service participation compared to 2019. Were there
10 hitches? Absolutely. Were there glitches?
11 Absolutely. We've learned tremendously from that
12 experience. And, ah, and as a matter of fact we did
13 an after, ah, program report and many of those, ah,
14 changes have already been implemented at DFTA. Since
15 late, ah, April of last year then GetFood NYC, which
16 was established by the mayor, he established a food
17 czar and established GetFood New York City, to
18 address food hunger for all New Yorkers, had been
19 responsible for filling the gap for unmet food needs
20 for all New Yorkers. So we also know the suspension
21 of congregate meals in senior centers has had a great
22 impact on older adults and the centers themselves,
23 and our whole network. For older adults the absence
24 of congregate meals results in reduced social
25

1 activity and engagement with the center itself. They
2 are trusted partners. They are most trusted
3 partners. We are eager to see senior centers
4 continue to increase their engagement with their
5 members and nonmembers as we await full reopening of
6 senior centers. As you remember, one of my earlier
7 hearings, I thought that was gonna happen last, ah,
8 May. And then I was hopeful we would do it in July.
9 And here we are in March of 2021, almost a year
10 without having senior centers. Social isolation
11 occurs when a person has little or not contact with
12 anyone. In older adults, as you all well know, it
13 can be harmful to their well-being and lead to a
14 variety of serious health problems, including
15 depression, cognitive decline, and heart disease.
16 Combatting social isolation has always been a top
17 priority for the agency. These efforts have
18 increased over the last year. During the pandemic,
19 as we said earlier, DFTA and its providers, its, all
20 of its providers have stepped up to the challenge,
21 have been conducting thousands of wellness and check-
22 in calls. These calls serve as an essential purpose,
23 not only to check in on an older adult, but to
24 provide referral services, like food, friendly
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2 visiting, elder abuse, mental health, and other
3 services that the city is setting up during the
4 COVID-19 pandemic. To date more than 3.3 million
5 calls have been placed since last March and almost,
6 as I said earlier, 200,000 adults have been, ah,
7 reached. One of the things is that innovation has,
8 ah, this pandemic has forced innovation and a
9 rethinking of how we do everything. So one of the
10 issues that has emerged is the friendly visiting
11 program, focused, ah, on isolation, largely homebound
12 seniors who were served through DFTA's 21 contract
13 service managers, which covered all 59 community
14 districts. The program matches older adults facing
15 the negative effects of social isolation with well-
16 trained volunteers who help spend time with them in
17 order to provide some social interaction. As a
18 result, Friendly Visiting Service serves as a mental
19 health intervention program. The program model
20 expands the older adult's connection to their
21 community and may prevent, um, the isolated older
22 adult from declining into depression and loneliness.
23 During the last year these visits have been conducted
24 all virtually. To address the social isolation and
25 loneliness of older, active older adults, DFTA also

1 learned, launched Friendly Voices, which is a version
2 of friendly visiting, ah, and we launched that in
3 October 2020. This program is set up to remain
4 virtual even after the pandemic is over. The
5 eligibility is open to a wide range of older adults.
6 Friendly Voices offer older adults the option to be
7 matched with a volunteer, a peer or a small virtual
8 group. The Friendly Voices currently has opening for
9 older adults to join. To sign up as a volunteer an
10 older adult, individuals can call Aging Connect at
11 212-244-64969 and as you know we've launched a, um, a
12 PSA last, ah, March, um, last May, and Manuel Miranda
13 served as our voice and we were able to get
14 volunteers for that, ah, PSA, encouraging all New
15 Yorkers to give five minutes of their time to, to an
16 older adult. Ah, in February 2020 without in, in any
17 way anticipating this pandemic, DFTA launched our
18 Aging Connect Hotline, which was to serve as a
19 navigator, ah, assistance for families and older
20 adults, ah, and introducing them to our operations
21 and to the network at large. This, it was fortuitous
22 that we did that in February. Through this program
23 we were ensuring that older adults would have
24 immediate and direct access to information and
25

1 referrals as their families and friends would have.
2 The line is staffed by full-time, trained aging
3 specialists and operates weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to
4 5:30 a.m. All of the staff speak at least one
5 language other than English, including Spanish,
6 Mandarin, Japanese, ah, Cantonese, and Haitian
7 Creole. The top call categories include benefits and
8 entitlements, housing, meals, general information
9 about DFTA programs and services, and services. In
10 the first year Aging Connect served, received 79,000
11 calls, which is an average of 302 calls per day. The
12 annual budget for this program is 3.1 million. Aging
13 Connect has shown to be an excellent partner
14 navigator, ah, during this pandemic. Home-delivered
15 meals, ah, program is another vital component of
16 DFTA's network, as you well said earlier, um,
17 Chairwoman Chin. Not only do home-delivered meals
18 provide sustenance for homebound older adults across
19 the five boroughs, the interaction with a delivery
20 person, which for many seniors might be the only
21 direct human interaction for the day, supports our
22 ongoing efforts to combat social isolation, which
23 was, as you all known, exacerbated, ah, during this
24 pandemic. The driver would not be able most of the
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1 time to have direct contact or leave a meal outside
2 the individual's door. The number of meals delivered
3 to homebound older adults increased by 5% between,
4 ah, 2019 and, and FY20. In 2020 a total of 4,950,426
5 meals were delivered by our providers. In the spring
6 of 2020 DFTA consolidated the 23 contracts into 15
7 contracts, giving the providers more flexibility in
8 how they manage the expenses of these contracts. The
9 total budget for this program is 41.8 million
10 dollars. Through the contracts, DFTA-funded programs
11 are able to address the most critical overarching
12 goals of the home-delivered meals program, including
13 increasing meal options for recipients, embracing the
14 diversity of our city by increasing the availability
15 of culturally aligned meals, and vegetarian, halal,
16 kosher, Latin, pan Asian, and promoting uniformly
17 high-quality meals from good food. Also, a great
18 initiative, and I know it's important to you,
19 Chairwoman Chin, is the social adult daycare
20 programs. Local Law 9 of 2015 required that all
21 social adult daycare centers, ah, operating in the
22 city are required to register with DFTA and that DFTA
23 also serves as an ombudsman for any complaints
24 against these facilities. In FY20, ah, DFTA received

1 registration forms from four, ah, 262 out of the 347
2 centers. From January to December 20 there were 140
3 distinct allegations received. 36% of the
4 allegations were related to potential Medicaid fraud.
5 As such, the senior adult daycare centers used cash
6 and/or goods as incentive to enroll potential adults
7 into the program and/or billing for services not
8 rendered. This year centers have remained closed to
9 in-persons gathering as all congregate settings have,
10 and there have been 11 complaints filed so far, from
11 failure to comply with Executive Order 100, which
12 bans congregate, um, gatherings during this pandemic.
13 In addition to the pivots having to be made, ah, to
14 address the pandemic itself, DFTA has been happy to
15 support the efforts of the Vaccine Command Center,
16 the VVC, ah, the VCC, as it's commonly known, n, in
17 helping it in COVID vaccine roll-out with our
18 existing resources. Upon the expansion of the
19 vaccine eligibility to older adults we immediately
20 activated our providers to start contacting older
21 adult clients to distribute information about the
22 vaccine, as well as assist folks in scheduling their
23 appointment. DFTA and its providers are currently
24 making thousands of calls a day in which we share
25

1 information about vaccines, make appointments, and,
2 when necessary, ah, provide available transportation
3 options. We have also sent robocalls in several
4 languages directly to older adults as part of this
5 outreach. In partnership with the VCC we've worked
6 with city Meals on Wheels to place printed collateral
7 about older, what older New Yorkers need to know
8 about the vaccine and their home-delivered meal box,
9 ah, boxes, to approximately 20,000 clients. To
10 supplement the free ambulette and taxi services
11 offered by the city, many of our senior centers have
12 made their vehicles avail to support older adults'
13 access to the, ah, vaccination appointments. We know
14 the best systems have been laid out. However, supply
15 has, ah, has never been able to meet the demand. We
16 believe that we'll have a breakthrough in that rather
17 shortly, so lots of frustration around the supply and
18 demand issues. Um, DFTA is also supporting the plan
19 to vaccine individual adults who are homebound as
20 well. For those who have limited mobility, bringing
21 vaccine centers as close to them as possible is
22 essential, with a focus on the 33 neighborhoods
23 identified by the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and
24 Equity. The city has set up temporary vaccine
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1
2 clinics at many NYCHA senior centers and community
3 centers, as well as within NORCs. Now that a vaccine
4 is available that is more easily transported the city
5 has started a pilot door-to-door campaign with the
6 New York City Fire Department and will soon
7 incorporate healthcare provider experience in home
8 base, in home-based case, ah, such as visiting
9 doctors and nurses as well as larger providers,
10 including Northwell, Mount Sinai, and Montefiore to
11 provide in-home vaccinations to those who are unable
12 to leave their home. DFTA and providers are reaching
13 out to clients who are known or likely to be
14 homebound within our programs to confirm that they
15 would like an in-home vaccine. Currently in its
16 initial phase, the program would scale up in the next
17 coming weeks as supply of the Johnson and Johnson
18 vaccine increases. This, ah, vaccine does not have
19 the same requirements, storage requirements as
20 Moderna and Pfizer. In support of the direct, ah,
21 vaccine distribution, DFTA, ah, staff has signed up
22 to volunteer weekends at City One vaccination
23 distribution centers, ensuring that those with
24 appointments have a seamless process upon, ah,
25 arrival. I have served as a secret shopper in many

1 of the sites to ensure that access and services for
2 older adults are adequate. I cannot reiterate enough
3 how important our providers and community
4 partnerships are, how the DFTA staff has stepped up
5 through this process, from calling older adults to
6 helping schedule appointments, disseminating
7 information, and advocating for local sites. Our
8 partners continue to advocate for and provide support
9 to their community. We appreciate those services.
10 We appreciate these efforts. We could not have been
11 able to serve older adults without this partnership.
12 In conclusion, I will always say there are always
13 more ideas for which undergo is necessary, but I
14 continue to be proud of the great work that DFTA and
15 our providers have, ah, accomplished with our
16 resources, our current resources. Despite difficult
17 financial times we have been able to meet the needs
18 of older adults across the city, develop new
19 programs, and expand reach to older adults who have
20 not been previously known to DFTA, which means that
21 we have, ah, the number of 1.4 million older adults,
22 many more of those are now known to, um, to
23 Department for the Aging as well as our providers,
24 and it's one of the things that you, Chairwoman Chin,

1
2 have always said, that we need to make sure that we
3 tap into that new, ah, pool of older adults who had
4 not been, ah, served by us before. Last year has
5 highlighted the resiliency of older adults as well as
6 the system gaps that should be strengthened in order
7 to fully allow people to live in their community as
8 long as they desire. We believe in a city where
9 people should be aging in place with dignity and
10 prevent institutionalization for as long as possible.
11 And we are very pleased that AARP has joined in that
12 same message. As we look towards, ah, the future I
13 look forward to continuing to explore ways to match
14 services to increase demands. We are excited to
15 continue to innovate services, not just as the
16 pandemic lessens, but as we look forward to the
17 future and the changing needs of our city and the
18 changing demographics of older New Yorkers in this
19 city. This is going to be the most age-inclusive,
20 age-friendly city in the United States. As always,
21 we are grateful to you, ah, Chairwoman Chin, for your
22 advocacy, for your support, personal and
23 professional, and also to the committee for your
24 advocacy and continued partnership, as we all support
25

1
2 older New Yorkers live, and live in this city. I
3 thank you for this opportunity.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you, Commissioner. We
5 will now turn it to the chair for questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Um, thank you,
7 Commissioner. We also have been joined by Council
8 Member Vallone, Council Member Treyger, and Council
9 Member Deutsch. I'm gonna start off with a couple of
10 question and then I'm gonna turn it to my colleagues,
11 ah, to also ask some question. Ah, Commissioner,
12 thank you to your testimony and, you know, we have a
13 strong partnership, ah, in this session and I hope
14 that in this budget we will help build a foundation
15 for the future for DFTA. And we have to increase the
16 budget for DFTA. The older adult population is
17 growing but DFTA's budget is not growing. I mean,
18 it's still less than half a percent of the city's 9.2
19 billion dollar budget, and that is unconscionable and
20 we gotta really fight for more, ah, even though you
21 talked about the administration increasing the budget
22 because of our advocacy, but it's just not enough. I
23 mean, looking back at, um, you talked about the
24 senior center utilization. In 2020, in the calendar
25 year of 2020 senior center utilization was down 15%

1
2 from 2019. Ah, DFTA reached 108,000 senior with its
3 virtual programming this year, but, in, in an
4 ordinary year there are usually about 7.6 million
5 duplicated seniors who come to the center to have
6 meals. And so how do you think that DFTA, why do you
7 think that DFTA was not able to continue to reach as
8 many seniors during COVID and then what resources are
9 in the budget to bring these seniors back, ah, to the
10 DFTA program? And then the other things is that I
11 know that we talked about in some of the past hearing
12 we were hopeful that, you gave the indication that we
13 might have some active started in the center. So
14 what is the timeline for reopening the senior center,
15 ah, for the meal program and for our NORCs and, and
16 other in-person service?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So that is
18 about eight questions and I'm gonna try to remember
19 all of them, Madam Chair, and try to do one by one.
20 In terms of the data of, of whether we serve as many
21 older adults as we have in the past, it is a matter
22 of trying to at this point reconcile data with
23 GetFood as well as the data with the wellness and
24 give a, a fuller picture. We have, that has not been
25 done yet. We've been, ah, as we say in Spanish

1 [speaking in Spanish], we're cooking and, ah, eating
2 at the same time. So we're looking at that data so
3 that we can have a holistic picture of exactly how
4 many older adults have been served. As for the
5 opening of the older adult centers, we have to
6 realize the science. That's what we trust and that's
7 what we rely on. When we get guidance that there is
8 enough either herd immunity or whatever the new terms
9 are, where it is safe for older adults to congregate,
10 then we will be, um, moving in that direction. That
11 being said, we have never, um, and I'll to work with
12 our, ah, providers. Ah, 180 of them have said that
13 they're interested should we have the opportunity,
14 and we're working with OMB right now, is to get them
15 reengaged in the meal provision so that we can go to
16 a direct delivery program, similar to GetFood,
17 similar to what we did as DFTA Direct One, we're
18 calling DFTA Direct Two, until the date that the we
19 can open the older adult centers. It's to get the
20 programs engaged, and there's 180 of them right now,
21 ah, that have been reviewed and we are, ah, in, in
22 partnership with OMB reviewing those so that we can
23 get those going as soon as possible. Um, the other
24 question was, um, related to the changing
25

1
2 demographics and the size of DFTA's budget. You
3 know, as I well know, that given the change in the
4 demographics of the older adults, given the change in
5 the growth numbers and where we've identified service
6 gaps, we are constantly looking for innovation and
7 new approaches so that we could address those gaps,
8 ah, because the status quo is not going to, one, does
9 not lead us to the future and, more importantly, does
10 not serve the needs of even current older adults,
11 much less, ah, the future and the number that we
12 anticipate, particularly in view of the changing
13 demographics.

14 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I mean, that's
15 what I was surprised at. I didn't see any new needs,
16 um, in the DFTA budget. Ah, and in your testimony
17 you talked about the success of all these virtual
18 program, which is really looking at the future of
19 connecting more older adults, and there was no
20 request, um, for new needs, for technology. I know
21 that you and I have talked about before, um, in the
22 budget, I mean, how do we help more seniors have
23 access to the training, um, to tablets, ah, laptop, I
24 mean, the, the program that you talked about, the
25 10,000 NYCHA seniors, um, that's a drop in the

1 bucket, right? And so how do we ensure that more
2 seniors, ah, will have this resource? Because, as
3 you said earlier, I mean, it's just a great way of
4 connecting to more seniors who may not go to the
5 traditional, ah, senior center for meal, but they'll
6 get online and participate in an exercise program and
7 other kind of program. Ah, so do you anticipate, um,
8 do you, does DFTA have any information on how many
9 seniors lack the technology access, ah, that could
10 benefit from it? And then how is DFTA offering,
11 another thing is that the budgetary flexibility, ah,
12 for provider, um, to get technology to seniors during
13 COVID, um, to get them connected online?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right. So
16 during this, during this process we worked, again,
17 one of our sister agencies, it has been the, the
18 chief technology officer and we've been working very
19 closely with them on some models where we could
20 expand the program, um, modeled after the NYCHA
21 program, but even expand that. And we're looking at
22 that. We had, um, something like 20 innovative
23 volunteers, ah, from high-tech industry, ah, working
24 with us to come up with some designs, and so we're
25 looking at that right now. We know that, ah, it

1 costs us a million, a million, a million two, um,
2 for, ah, OATH, you know, to do the training for the
3 NYCHA program and the ongoing support for the NYCHA
4 program. So we have some, ah, indication. We
5 constantly work with, with, um, with OMB on all of
6 these conversations around innovations and future
7 directions and aging in place with dignity. And so
8 those conversations are always ongoing with OMB. The
9 thing that we have encountered, ah, in addition to
10 this pandemic, ah, as you well know and many of you
11 know, um, has been the financial downturn in the
12 city. And so with the, um, with this change and this
13 new administration Washington with some relief that
14 we think that those conversations can continue, um,
15 can continue and maybe bear some fruit. But at this
16 point the city is, has faced an enormous, ah,
17 financial downturn and, um, which has also impacted
18 us.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: But there's hope
21 coming in the future, so that's what I, in my opening
22 I wanted to DFTA to really think about, well, how do
23 we plan for the future, anticipating that there will
24 be some resource coming and we need to really be
25 prepared for that. Um, in December of 2020, um,

1
2 there was 900 billion dollar of the stimulus that
3 included, ah, 3.2 billion through an emergency
4 broadband benefit to help millions of students,
5 families, unemployed workers to afford broadband that
6 they need during the pandemic. Was DFTA coordinating
7 to inform, ah, older adults, eligible seniors, ah,
8 who might be able to apply for this benefit, that are
9 on SNAP and Medicaid?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I would
11 have to get back to you because, ah, I will see what
12 we were doing with the virtual programming. I don't
13 have that readily available. I'll have to get back
14 to you on that. What I can tell you is with, for the
15 homebound what we did was, um, we were able to,
16 because of the increased demand in home-delivered
17 meals with the stimulus money that we received at
18 DFTA, we dedicated to home-delivered meals and we've
19 been able to, we set aside money so that we can
20 continue meeting that increase 'til this July. Um,
21 and, um, and our home-delivered meals, ah, the
22 increase in our home-delivered meals are covered
23 until then.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, with the home-
25 delivered meal program, um, I think there were about

1
2 73,000 seniors that received the GetFood, ah, program
3 in 2020 and then DFTA had to transfer around 800
4 eligible seniors, um, that are eligible for home-
5 delivered meal to GetFood, ah, due to the over-
6 utilization of the home-delivered program. So how
7 much more funding is needed to fund the full need of
8 the home-delivered meal program and how is DFTA
9 reconnecting the seniors who are GetFood to go back
10 to the home-delivered meal program?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely,
12 and, ah, and that's exactly one of the issues that
13 we're working on right now, Chairwoman Chin. We, for
14 us there was, you know, in order of priority it was
15 to make sure that no one went, ah, an older adult
16 [inaudible] did not go hungry, right? Um, and one of
17 the things that we did was during the case management
18 process if the home-delivered meal provider in their
19 particular area was at capacity, even over capacity,
20 ah, and could not provide services we immediately got
21 them on to GetFood. That was, that was the priority.
22 And what we're doing right now is looking at how many
23 are on GetFood, what is the capacity of the home-
24 delivered meal programs currently, and, um, and what
25 will we need to continue to support those, ah,

1 individuals on GetFood. Jose, do you want to add
2 anything on the home-delivered meals budget portion
3 that I may be, I have missed?
4

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No,
6 Commissioner. Commissioner, you actually hit all
7 the, the high points.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: OK. So
9 we're over, we're over capacity and, um, our
10 providers are at capacity, and, and working hard and
11 for, and we use GetFood as a default, OK?

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, I told the...

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And we're
14 looking at the cost.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I, I told the OMB
16 director when we had the finance hearing that
17 providers are asking for another 16.6 million dollar
18 of the home-delivered meal program so that we meet
19 the national average, because right now we're paying
20 the provider much less, ah, for the, from the
21 national average, and a lot of them are suffering
22 deficits from this program and that should not be the
23 case. So we're advocating for more money on that.
24 Um, I'm gonna come back.
25

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I, I, I
3 hear you, but I also want to remind you that we also
4 last year, as you well know and, and with your
5 support we were able to increase the meal costs, the
6 per-meal cost for home-delivered meals last year.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, but not enough,
8 so we gotta do more. [laughs]

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [laughs]

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Ah, I'm gonna pass on
11 to my, ah, colleagues to get a chance to ask some
12 question and then I'll, I'll come back with some of
13 the other question.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. I will now
15 call on council members in the order they have used
16 the Zoom raise hand function. Council members,
17 please limit your questions to five minutes. The
18 Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and will let you
19 know when your time is up. We will first hear from
20 Council Member Ayala, followed by Council Member
21 Vallone, and then Council Member Deutsch. Council
22 Member Ayala.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Good morning,
25 everyone. Good morning, Commissioner.

1 COMMITTEE ON AGING 39
2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Good
3 morning.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Good morning,
5 everyone. So just, I have some questions. One of
6 them is regarding, so I know that we don't have a
7 date yet and it's, it's, you know, there's no way to
8 predict when senior centers will be able to open.
9 But I'm wondering as the weather starts to get nicer,
10 has there been any thought process to maybe, um,
11 using some of the, ah, open streets as a possibility
12 for outdoor programming for maybe exercise classes.
13 Um, I know, you know, jewelry-making, painting, these
14 are, you know, um, no-touch, low-contact type of
15 activities that can be, I'm sorry, my staff left
16 their phone there and it's ringing. Um, but these
17 activities that can be done outdoors that would allow
18 for some level of, you know, of interaction among
19 peers, and I know that they would love it. Um, and
20 then two, the second question is, is regarding the,
21 ah, mental health training. So we, we voted on that
22 bill in October, I think, of 2018 to require, ah, the
23 mental health first aid training for, ah, caseworkers
24 and, and individuals that work in senior centers that
25 are coming, you know, interfacing with the, the

1
2 senior adult population, and I'm wondering has any of
3 that training, um, started, um, because I'm
4 concerned, right, as, as people, you know, we're in
5 year one of this pandemic, ah, a whole year without,
6 you know, that, that level of interaction, um, and as
7 caseworkers are making these calls are they able,
8 better able, better prepared to identify mental
9 health issues, depression in older adults that
10 they're, ah, interacting with?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Great,
12 thank you for the questions. All right, so I'm gonna
13 take the first one first, all right, ah, Council
14 Member? Um, we have been working very closely with
15 the Department of Health and Mental Health on
16 guidance on what kind of activities can we, um,
17 provide. And we, almost weekly we meet with them as,
18 as programs come to us with ideas of can I do this,
19 can I do that, we meet with the Department of Health
20 to get some guidance. We've been talking for a
21 while, and this came straight from the network, um,
22 talking for a while, can we do meals outdoors? How
23 can we, how can we do some meals, how can we do
24 activities? How can we do tai chi? All which can
25 require, you know, distance, you know. Tai chi is an

1
2 important form of exercise for us, but it's also key
3 in all senior centers because it's a fall prevention,
4 ah, ah, process. And so it's, it's one of those
5 activities that's very important to, along with many
6 others and certain dance classes. And so we're
7 working with the Department of Health and Mental
8 Health to give us some guidance on what we can do,
9 the number of people we can do, the kind of, the kind
10 of requirements that we would have to put in place,
11 just like we did, ah, Council Member Ayala, when we
12 started opening cooling centers last year. Um, we,
13 we went through a very rigorous, um, process with
14 them as to what the guidelines were and, ah, we're
15 doing every day and looking into that. As for the
16 mental health, ah, first aid mental health, yes, that
17 has been done. I'll get back to you with the number
18 of sessions and the number of people, ah, trained to
19 date, all right?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Oh, thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you,
22 always.

23 MODERATOR: Thank, thank you, Council
24 Member. We will now hear from Council Member
25 Vallone.

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Good morning,
4 Commissioner, how are you?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Good, good.
6 Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I guess this is
8 our last one together. I know...

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I know.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: ...Mighty, Mighty
11 Margaret, as we call our, our Aging chair, I have
12 been from day one for eight years, and I know it'll
13 be bittersweet next year watching us without us, but
14 um, you know we always check in just to, to have more
15 fun, right? That's, that's our role, and I guess
16 seeing after eight years that this committee and
17 under Margaret seeing a budget, so it's not you, it
18 comes from the administration. If the budget goes
19 from 50 billion to 90 billion in those eight years
20 and we're still at that half a percent, you just cry
21 inside because you know there are so many more
22 seniors that we could reach, but with the budget that
23 you have it's, it's, you're doing the work you can
24 with what you have. But we are always gonna fight
25 for that extra funding and that, that is a big hope

1
2 of mine for the next administration, to finally
3 prioritize in that budget. I, I got a question I
4 want to pass on and maybe you can, and this could be
5 pretty easy if, if, if what they're saying is
6 correct. So I have three of the larger providers. I
7 have, um, Common Point, I have Self Help, I have
8 Hannick, and a couple of smaller. And, and they're
9 saying that as of July 1 they were told by DFTA to
10 not use the funding that they, the small amount of
11 funding they had for budget for home-delivered meals.
12 And they still have yet to get the green light to use
13 that. And they want to provide the home-delivered
14 meals, but they have to use private funding to do
15 that. That seems like something that we can do
16 rather quickly, or like they're not getting an answer
17 as to when that can be green lighted. For the budget
18 that they did have they were told don't use it. Can,
19 can we take a look at that and see, because that to
20 me...

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will take
22 a look at that, because that doesn't sound familiar
23 or correct at all. So I will...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: They said from
25 when, July 1, I guess when they [inaudible] home-

1 delivered meals would stop at, at that point, being
2 funded. They have yet to get the green light.
3 That's seven months now. So they've had to raise
4 private funding to meet the needs of the seniors.
5 There is a budget allocated amount that they have in
6 a contract, but they've been told not to use that.
7 So maybe that's something, if we could look at that
8 pretty quickly, that would be a quick way to
9 [inaudible].
10

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will, I
12 will definitely look at that, because that doesn't
13 even sound correct to me, all right? And, um, and I,
14 you know, and I have the greatest respect for
15 Hannick. I mean, I love [inaudible].

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, they've
17 been, I don't what I would have done out here without
18 them, they have been [inaudible].

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, I
20 know. They, and, and, and Self Help also. So
21 they're excellent providers. We'll look into that,
22 and I, immediately after this hearing I'll get back
23 to you, all right?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: That would be
25 wonderful, because that's something we could do...

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And I will
3 make sure that our staff gets back to them, all
4 right?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Perfect, I love
6 it.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [inaudible]
8 all right?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And, and the
10 last, the only thing I wanted to think of is, is
11 going through what we all through in this last year
12 is how do we maybe tackle or do things different in
13 the future, in my eyes, when something happens again,
14 right? And we all have to take new precautions for
15 whatever comes. Like we saw in the schools, the kids
16 needed to do virtual and unfortunately still at the
17 high schools a lot of the kids [inaudible] home are
18 still home. But without that technology they would
19 not have been able to continue some type of teaching.
20 If the lesson for here is that we were not able to
21 get to our seniors in their centers and the, the
22 deprivation of that family and human contact has been
23 instrumental on new mental health issues and, and
24 continuing for our seniors, we have to incorporate a
25 new approach on how we can get them into a different

1 way, and to me the only way is that is with
2 technology. And I wanted to follow on Chair Chin's
3 conversation before. I mean, the only, ah, virtual
4 technology we have [inaudible] is when we funded from
5 our own council and we, we did a virtual lab. But
6 two things what happened are the seniors had to stay
7 separate in their areas and couldn't go through
8 Common Points, so the difficulty would be some type
9 of tablet for each, which would be a dream, but the
10 budget there wouldn't support that now. But we would
11 have to maybe think of some type of virtual area,
12 virtual laptop computer access for critical, ah,
13 services, for doctors, for mental health, for
14 exercising, and for families to see their loved ones,
15 and that is something that I would think maybe we can
16 try to build a plan for that, coming for, I mean,
17 this budget is happening now, but I'm actually gonna
18 work with Margaret to put in a bill in to start to,
19 to focus to require that because it's the only way I
20 think we're gonna get something. But is that
21 something that maybe we could focus for and maybe lay
22 the groundwork for [inaudible]?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [inaudible]
25 yeah. First of all, thank you. Um, because it's

1 what, three things I want to respond to. One is we
2 are doing, we did an after, after-action report on
3 DFTA Direct Meals One and we did a lot of learning,
4 and uncovered things that, we changed our system.
5 One of them was the way that we maintain data, up-to-
6 date data, on clients and how, you know, 'cause we
7 learned, you know, we had old data...

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: ...and, you
11 know, we needed to have a system that had some
12 integrity in it, and so we hired someone to do
13 integrity checks on the data, not integrity checks
14 for violation, but integrity checks to make sure that
15 the data is the most current and are working with our
16 partners in that. Um, so that was one major lesson
17 learned. The other, the other, ah, lesson, and so
18 that goes to the heart of your issue, is how do we
19 have access and how do we get information to them,
20 right? And so that is one of the things that we've
21 done. We are also do after-action report on the
22 NYCHA, ah, tablet program to show what was, what
23 worked there, what doesn't, and where do we need to
24 expand. But you're absolutely right, and one of the
25 things that this whole virtual world has taught us is

1
2 that we should have a library, you know, and so what
3 we've done is try to catalogue and work with partners
4 in the network to start cataloging some of those
5 trainings, putting them into a library, and we're
6 looking at, you know, a library, a virtual library, I
7 have, don't ask me.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No, that's, and,
9 and you have had, you've spoken to that in the past.
10 That's a great idea. All the partners...

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And so, and
12 so, it's like put, put, have a repository, don't ask
13 me the technical stuff, I will fail and I will make
14 it up...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You, that's the
16 somebody...

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And so,
18 but, but having a repository where people can have
19 access to that programming, and if I were a family
20 member and I'm taking my mother upstate, but then she
21 could still have access to that and I can enable that
22 because I can tap into that system. And those are
23 the kind of things that we're looking at and that
24 we've learned how, and also embracing family members
25 and neighbors and, and extended family members more

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2 in this theme that we called breaking social
3 isolation, you know, which is not just [inaudible].

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I, I, those are
5 all wonderful. Until we get, though, an actual piece
6 of hardware, additional laptops...

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely,
8 absolutely.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: ...additional
10 virtual, then, then all the data is not still getting
11 us a human contact, the seniors that we couldn't get
12 to see, and it broke my heart on so many levels. In
13 another world I [inaudible] all my clients can't get
14 to see or they couldn't be there when they passed, or
15 when they were very sick, or when the COVID was at
16 its peak. No one could have any, and there, there
17 was, couldn't even see them. So maybe I, I'd like to
18 focus, then that, that strictly would have to be
19 budget, because we know it works. We have to get
20 some type of community, ah, centered tablet or larger
21 screen and then hopefully in the future by floor and
22 by room so that folks could have those services, the
23 library you're talking about, and also see a loved
24 one or a doctor individually safely without mixing
25 that.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, and,
3 and, and...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,
5 Chair. I didn't mean to go...

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, and I
7 was gonna say there's tablet, there's smart phones,
8 there's so many other...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: All of that.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: A new, a
11 new, new apparatus that we should be tapping into,
12 absolutely.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you, and
14 thank you for looking in on the food service for the,
15 for the providers and something about the contract
16 being not used for services.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So if we could
19 look at that [inaudible].

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, yeah,
21 we'll get back to you on that immediately. Thank
22 you. Add to that...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you.
24 Thank you, Chair.

25 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right.

2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Commissioner, ah, to
3 follow up with, thank you, Council Member Vallone for
4 your strong advocacy and partnership. It's wonderful
5 working with you in the past, you know, eight years.
6 Um, and we gotta make this a strong budgeting this
7 year, and that's why we need new need. Ah,
8 Commissioner, um, maybe talking with the provider to
9 come up with, ah, some idea how much so that we can
10 advocate, ah, to get it into this budget. Um, we've
11 also been joined by Council Member Eugene, so, um,
12 Committee Counsel you can call on the next council
13 member with question.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. We now
15 hear from Council Member Deutsch.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Ah, thank you.
18 Good morning, Commissioner.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Good
20 morning.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Good morning.
22 Um, I'm sorry, I'm not on Zoom 'cause I have notes on
23 my phone, and, ah, OK. So according to the data, the
24 number of homeless individuals, ah, age 65-plus
25 increased over 300% from 2004 to 2017. And it

1 continues to, to say that if nothing is done by 2030,
2 ah, the homeless population, ah, for seniors can
3 tripled. Now, I'm extremely concerned about the
4 future of senior housing and the current situation of
5 when a senior can't afford their rent and even with
6 all the programs such as SCRIE. Now, I have been
7 working on a senior housing plan in my district since
8 the beginning of 2019 and this administration has
9 been dragging their feet, and I'm talking about
10 hundreds of senior housing in my district. I have a
11 plan. I have the, the space that's owned by, ah,
12 city owned, and up until yesterday the
13 administration's been ignoring, um, land use and City
14 Planning regarding my plan since the beginning of
15 2019. Now, what role does DFTA play in senior
16 homelessness and what conversations, ah, does DHS, in
17 particular Commissioner Banks, ah, have with
18 Department of Aging to work with your office on
19 future senior housing, as well as, um, seniors
20 possibly being evicted or displaced from their
21 apartments when they cannot afford their rent?
22

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right,
24 let me, let me take that, parse it out as best I can
25 and try to answer your inquiries. As for senior

1
2 older adults who are homeless we have three programs
3 that we work with, ah, Project Find, and, ah, several
4 other programs. We have a program that, um,
5 provides, ah, supports for men who live in a
6 veteran's, ah, who are homeless or who live in, ah,
7 shelters. So we, we work closely with those
8 providers that provide those services. We also work
9 very closely, ah, with NYCHA if a older person is
10 finding themselves at the point of eviction. We have
11 [inaudible] and relationships so that we can, ah,
12 bring in some services and try to prevent that, um,
13 that, ah, dispossessed notice or, um, anything of
14 that nature. We work very closely with HPD. You
15 know that the city has a goal of, ah, a housing goal
16 for older adults. Um, we are well into that program
17 and we work very closely with HPD to constantly
18 advocate for older adult housing. We know that it is
19 essential because as a city we believe and are
20 committed to people aging in place with dignity and
21 part of that, it requires a home, ah, so that older
22 adults can do that to avoid institutionalization.
23 Um, housing is a critical need in this city and it
24 has been a great shortage. But as far as
25 coordination with those sister agencies who have

1
2 primary responsibility it is something that we do on
3 a regular basis, and we also support the network to
4 ensure that we prevent homelessness wherever
5 possible.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So what is
7 there, what is the goal, um, and has that, ah, goal
8 been met?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The senior,
10 the development of, of, of older adult affordable
11 housing, the, the mayor had a goal. I think, I
12 believe that that was established, um, about two
13 years ago, that, the goal, and I will get to you as
14 to what percentage has been, um, what percentage has
15 been met. I do not have that data with me. I will
16 get back to you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Now do you, um,
18 do you have any data on how many seniors have applied
19 for the rental, ah, one-shot payments?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will have
21 to get back to you on that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: OK. Um, do you
23 have conversations with Commissioner Banks about, ah,
24 senior homelessness?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I have,
3 our, I have conversations with, ah, Commissioner
4 Banks on many items, including homelessness as well
5 as food insecurity and income insecurity. Those are
6 conversations that...

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: ... we have
9 regularly.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Did, ah, does
11 Commissioner Banks, um, does he, like, um,
12 collaborate with you on, on senior housing plans that
13 council members, ah, bring up to him?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I cannot
15 speak about individual items. I don't recall us
16 discussing individual projects.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: When was the
18 last time Commissioner Banks, um, had a conversation
19 with Department of Aging about senior homelessness,
20 do you, can you recall that?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, I
22 can't.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Um, was it any
24 time within the last year?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm sure it
3 was within the last year because...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: You...

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: ...I'm sure
6 it centered around the pandemic and the homelessness
7 and concerns we both share around the pandemic.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So my question
9 is like, um, if a senior cannot afford rent, um,
10 where does, where does the Department of Aging, um,
11 refer them to and how does that, how is that followed
12 up?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: If a senior
14 cannot afford rent, it depends on who the referral
15 source is. It usually is a community agency that
16 then will advocate and turn it to the appropriate
17 city agency to get that support.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Ah, OK, do you,
19 um, do you feel...

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Or they
21 will...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Do you feel that
23 we need to build more senior housing?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Of course
25 we need to build more senior housing. Of course we

1 do. There's a shortage of housing in the city.

2 There's a shortage of affordable housing. There's a
3 shortage of senior housing, and the, and the
4 administration has a very ambitious goal for senior
5 housing.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, 'cause it
8 doesn't seem that it's that ambitious because if I
9 have a plan in my district for senior housing since
10 the beginning of 2019 and I can get a meeting with
11 Commissioner Banks to push this project, it doesn't
12 seem that they're quite ambitious about it. Would
13 you, Commissioner, would you support, um, and help
14 me, um, and support my plan for senior housing, ah,
15 to put some more pressure on this administration to
16 move along with that plan?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: What I am
18 willing to do, sir, with all due respect, is look at
19 your plan, talk to you about your plan, and also find
20 out what the status of your plan is.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: There's no
22 status because the city has been dragging their feet.
23 It's, ah, it's approximately between 50,000 and
24 80,000 square feet of, of land and, um, it's, um,
25 it's right in Brighton Beach, and it's on...

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CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Ah, Council...

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah?

CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member

Deutsch, I think we could follow up offline because, ah, on Friday's hearing, ah, with HPD, they do have programs, ah, that's subsidized, you know, building of senior housing and there's a goal, and so we could also help reach out, ah, to HPD on this. Usually it's a non, you could have a nonprofit provider, ah, putting together that program. But you and I can follow up offline and see how we can be hopeful.

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: OK. I just want end off by saying that I'm very disappointed with this administration when it comes to building, um, affordable housing and in particular for senior citizens with such a high homeless rate in New York City, and I'm extremely disappointed and I hope that, um, I can work together with Department of Aging. Commissioner, I just want to say that you do an amazing job and I support all the work that you do and we have a great chair who advocates for our senior population and people with disabilities. I, I just want to say for the record that I'm extremely disappointed, um, with our administration when it

1
2 comes to reaching their goals for providing senior
3 housing, where many seniors, um, have been displaced
4 and are being evicted when, when we see this rent,
5 when we see the rent moratorium end in May we don't
6 know what's gonna happen with 60,000 homeless people
7 out in the streets and, um, we could see it double
8 once the moratorium ends. So I just invited
9 Commissioner Banks for a citywide town hall meeting
10 to talk about, ah, what the city's plan is that once
11 this moratorium ends how are they gonna deal, um,
12 with, with additional people who may, ah, end up
13 homeless, ah, on our streets. So thank you very
14 much, Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, Council
16 Member Deutsch. Are there any other council member
17 that want to ask a question?

18 MODERATOR: Seeing that there are no
19 other council members with their hands raised I'll
20 turn it back to you, Chair Chin.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Um,
22 Commissioner, I just wanted to follow up. In your
23 testimony you did talk about the private social adult
24 daycare, um, and the number that was registered. How
25 did DFTA work with them during the pandemic, because,

1 um, they were not open. Do we know that they
2 contacted their client, um, to provide services like
3 our senior centers were doing?
4

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: One of the
6 things that we did was, frankly, ah, Chairwoman Chin,
7 and I'll get back to you on exactly what we did, but
8 I can tell you where we spent most of our time was
9 making sure that they were not open and we had to
10 focus on the, the, I can tell you the ones run by
11 DFTA, you know, with your support, ah, were in
12 constant touch with their clients and providing
13 virtual services and what our goal was with the other
14 ones was to make sure that they were not opening and,
15 um, making sure, um, that, you know, that was our
16 main focus, because we kept getting information that
17 they were open and we had to go back and keep
18 reminding them that they could not be open, ah, and
19 the, and the risk that that was being, um, exposed,
20 so. But I can I will get back to you on that
21 exactly, ah, what kind of oversight, we don't have
22 oversight of them. Ah, that's a state requirement.
23 Our, our role is an ombudsman that you, that you as,
24 um, frankly that you, ah, ensured that the city had
25 some role is as an ombudsman, you know, which is to

1 handle complaints and refer complaints to the
2 appropriate authority.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I think a lot
5 of, um, those clients, ah, didn't reach out, ah, to
6 DFTA or our senior service provider and got connected
7 with GetFood or, um, I mean, that's the, the growing
8 number of seniors that I think you've talked about,
9 ah, in other hearings.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, I
11 don't have, I don't have data, but I wouldn't be
12 surprised that that was a contributor to the
13 increased home-delivered meals. I don't have, we
14 don't have [inaudible]...

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO:
16 Commissioner, Commissioner, I can jump in. I mean,
17 basically there were, basically a lot of them did
18 pivot to doing, ah, outreach to the clients online.

19 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: They did get paid to
20 do that?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes,
22 that was part of their Medicaid reimbursement, yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, OK.

24 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
25 because...

1 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, because we,
2
3 because we heard some complaint from actually some of
4 the staff saying that they were not, getting the, the
5 reimbursement amount, ah, for what they were doing.
6 I said, well, talk to your MLTC.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And the state, um,
9 right, thank you. Um, so I just...

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you,
11 Jose.

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: ...wanted to focus, ah,
13 a couple of question on the future.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Like the, ah, older
16 adult center. Ah, because in your, um, in my opening
17 I talked about, you know, the need, um, and in your
18 own analysis with City Planning you mentioned that 29
19 out of 59, ah, community, ah, district needs more
20 senior centers, right? And so we didn't get the 10
21 million that was promised. I mean, that's not even
22 enough. But we just want to make sure that that 10
23 million is in this budget, and I told, ah, OMB
24 director, um, during the hearing. So what is DFTA's
25 strategy to meet this need? Um, and have you made,

1
2 ah, a request to OMB to talk about increased funding,
3 ah, for senior centers, because there is a great
4 need.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: OK. I want
6 to talk to you about the future. We know that there
7 is gonna be tremendous growth. We know that there
8 are many more people aging in place, ah, which is why
9 we see, ah, the diversity of particular communities
10 changing so much. We know that given that growth,
11 ah, we anticipate that there will be a need for
12 anywhere between 17 to 19 senior centers as well as
13 additional NORCs, or included in that as additional
14 NORCs. That is the future. Um, we are, we also know
15 that in-home services are going to be required, um,
16 as more people age in place and we want to ensure
17 that this is a city that is, ah, age-inclusive, where
18 people could age in place with dignity. So those are
19 all givens, and we, you know, we have scenarios for,
20 for all of those, um, of those growth opportunities.
21 We know that they are, um, and it's interesting to
22 see that there is a correlation between the 33
23 districts that were the high-need districts that,
24 that were identified by the Racial Equity Task Force,
25 that there is an overlap of service gaps in some of

1 those, um, in some of those districts also, and that
2 they will be experiencing the growth. So that, all
3 of that data and projecting forward is, um, is known.
4 But what we also know, ah, Chairwoman Chin, is that
5 the status quo is not going to be able to meet the
6 needs of, of, um, as we exist currently is not gonna
7 be able to meet the needs of the future.

9 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, there's gonna be
10 federal money coming, right? That is the, the
11 positive outlook. And, but we don't see, ah, the
12 increase of funding or, ah, increase in, ah, DFTA's,
13 ah, 2022 budget. It doesn't reflect the need. And
14 that's why we need to work with you to advocate you
15 with OMB. I mean, we need more senior new housing.
16 There's no capital money, um, in DFTA's budget. So
17 how are we gonna build more new senior centers,
18 right? I mean, all these capital projects, a project
19 that's funded by the council because of individual
20 requests.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We are in
22 constant communication with OMB and, ah, sharing with
23 them the future.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: We gotta make sure
25 that the stimulus money that's coming that we gotta

1
2 fight for our fair share. I mean, like that, that's
3 what has to be in this budget and so, Commissioner,
4 ah, you gotta work with us. Work with me to make
5 sure that they don't take that, first of all they
6 don't take back the money that was promised like last
7 year, right? We saw the 10 million in executive
8 budget and then it disappear. Um, but that's not
9 even enough. But if federal money are coming we have
10 to make sure that it gets into, ah, DFTA's budget.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm
12 always...

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So how...

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ:
15 ...appreciative and supported, I'm always
16 appreciative and I welcome your strong advocacy.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, we have to
18 really continue, ah, to work on that. I just,
19 there's one line or point that I want to make on the
20 technology.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I mean, the city has,
23 ah, the public access channel, and I know that we
24 talked about it in some past hearing, that some
25 programming, like the virtual programming, ah, the

1
2 library that you talked about, I mean, some of them
3 could be put into the public access channel because
4 everybody, pretty much everybody has a television,
5 you know, has a TV, um, that'd be able to, ah, get
6 that and certain program, ah, could be put into those
7 channel, then reaches, you know, more of the senior
8 population, especially the one that right now don't
9 have the technology. I mean, that could be a, a way
10 to fill the gap. Ah, so that's something that I
11 think we should work together on.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think,
13 thank you for that. I think it's something we will
14 pursue. Right now we are going to be, ah, launching
15 an anti-agism, combatting agism. You're gonna love
16 the, the, you're gonna love the artwork. As a matter
17 of fact, I think I'm gonna share it you real soon
18 after this hearing. Um, you're gonna see some of it.
19 It really is about aging is ageless. And, um, and,
20 um, that from, ah, AARP has also been a strong
21 partner in this. So we're really excited about it.
22 Yeah, but, yeah, there you go, yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And, ah,
25 we're really, we're really, between, I'm, I'm always

1
2 grateful to AARP for their support around, you know,
3 aging in place and their support around breaking the
4 status quo. So I'm always, so, welcome them. But
5 we'll share that with you. One of the things, the,
6 the reason I'm bringing this up is because we're
7 using some city channels that we normally would not
8 have used to launch this campaign, like the curb and
9 the taxis, and so the idea of using public access
10 television also just, you know, will just enhance,
11 um, our reach. So thank you for that suggestion.
12 You're gonna love...

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I mean...

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You're
15 gonna love this campaign.

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, I'm looking
17 forward to it because, ah, last night..

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yep, yep,
19 yep, yep, yep.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: ...at AARP I was, I was
21 a workshop with Dress for Success, ah, alumni and we
22 talked a lot about how to fight agism and age
23 discrimination. And AARP showed a video which was
24 very interesting.

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, oh my
3 God. Isn't that, isn't that video, I mean, that,
4 that, I think that video is one that got my
5 [inaudible], the one for age, that one, ah, is that
6 the one you're talking about? It...

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes, that's the one.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Excuse me.
9 It really touched a button with me, yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yep, yep. I know, so.
11 Ah, I know that we want to make sure that the public
12 have a chance, ah, to, ah, testify and speak. Ah,
13 but my last question, I think, oh, I do want to also
14 touch on the, um, wait list for case management and
15 home care, even though I think some of the home care,
16 ah, number might have kind of decreased during the
17 pandemic because there were some concerns from
18 clients. Maybe you could address that. But
19 definitely there was a huge increase in case
20 management, ah, wait list and so how are, is DFTA
21 dealing with that in terms of, you know, more, um,
22 funding to meet that need?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah,
24 there's no, there's no denying that this pandemic has
25 illustrated the greater need for in-home services and

1 the demand for that is people are aging in place.
2
3 But I just want to also say that the wait list
4 numbers is always this discussion that we have about,
5 um, is that a traditional wait list. Case management
6 agencies do an assessment from the very beginning and
7 what that number reflects is not that someone is void
8 of services, they're just not, maybe have gotten all
9 of the service. So it's like a triage kind of an
10 approach. Ah, so someone might be wait listed for
11 additional home care hours, but they're already
12 receiving some home care hours. Or someone might be
13 wait listed for another service. So it's not a
14 traditional wait list where someone is without
15 service. Yes, of course there's some people just
16 because of, um, of the increased demand. But it's
17 not the traditional wait list and I always try to get
18 people to understand that, because case management
19 agencies, who do an incredible job, because they're
20 triaging people all the time and making sure that
21 they have access to as many services as possible. So
22 it's...

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: OK.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The numbers
25 are never as high as it appears because someone might

1
2 be waiting but they're waiting for additional hours.
3 Um, or maybe we're trying to bring them back from
4 GetFood, but people are getting some level of
5 service. And then...

6 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And they
7 traditionally...

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Go ahead,
9 I'm sorry.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And traditionally we
11 have put in, um, extra money...

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Money, too.
13 Extra money...

14 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: ...to do that.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We put in
16 extra money last year to, to really cut that down
17 and, and it's a commitment and an effort that we are
18 on constant relationship with our case management
19 agencies. Um, and, you know, like all other
20 agencies, we meet with them on a regular basis to
21 triage these kind of issues.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, I think we
23 should really get, ah, some definite number in terms
24 of, from the, the service provider, what is the wait
25 list. You know, how many people...

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right,
3 we'll get that.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: ...are waiting for, for
5 services so that we know that how much resources we
6 need to advocate, especially, you know, the home
7 care, I mean, that is such a wonderful program for,
8 ah, older adults who are not on Medicaid. I mean,
9 these are hard-working, ah, older adult that has
10 contributed, um, to the tax base and they work hard
11 for the city, and now they need help.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And we heard back from
14 the seniors who got this support and how great it is
15 for them. Ah, so we had to make sure...

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And great
17 for the [inaudible].

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: ...that there's
19 resources, yeah.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And don't
21 forget that they provide home care, but they, we also
22 provide respite throughout caregiver program, and
23 these are supports that are essential for people to
24 age in place. I mean, you don't get a lot of
25 complaints about these programs.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: No, and a lot of
3 people still don't know about the program, so when I
4 mention it to them they were like surprised that they
5 can actually, oh, I could, I'm, I'm not on Medicaid.
6 I, can I qualify? So a lot of people don't even know
7 this resource is available. So my last question is
8 on the senior center RFP. Um, I mean, last year at
9 this time, you know, we, we heard that, ah, the RFP
10 is gonna come out and then five months later it, it
11 didn't happen, and then there was some
12 miscommunication, provider thought that they only had
13 a short period of time. But, I mean, officially I
14 asked for a delay, ah, because right now centers are
15 dealing with so many different issues. Ah, and we
16 gotta make sure that the budget, um, is there and
17 that we have enough resources to really support the
18 expansion, ah, of the, the senior center. So will
19 you consider, ah, postponing the RFP past the July 1,
20 ah, that was supposed to be the award date deadline?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So I've
22 been very responsive and respectful about everybody's
23 issues around the RFP. And to that I would say that
24 it would be virtually impossible to have a July 1
25 start date if we delay and postpone any longer. We

1
2 have taken everyone's considerations. There will be
3 an RFP in 22, whether it's a July 1 start date, more
4 than likely not. But there will be an RFP. We
5 cannot continue with the status quo. To much has
6 changed in the city for us not to do that. Um, but
7 we are also being as responsive as we have been, and
8 you know, you know that I've said this to you, that
9 an RFP has to come up so that we can really start
10 shaping for current state, which is very different.
11 These programs have been in place since for, some of
12 them for 10 years, nine years. Ah, the last time we
13 issued an RFP, and it was on a small scale, were
14 seven years ago. Who the older adult is today, who
15 New York City is today is very different than it was.
16 And it's for all of us. I keep hearing from the
17 network, from many people in the network. I've heard
18 fibromyalgia few who don't want it . But I hear
19 from many, ah, who also are saying when is it coming,
20 because they, too, want to move on and, and grow and,
21 and be able to, to respond to the future need, to the
22 current needs, which are very different than, than,
23 than what they've been able to and, ah, also to the
24 future needs. And I'm sure that many of them will
25 testify after I get off and they will tell you their

1
2 opinion. But I know that to be responsive and to
3 live into the future you've got to start sometime and
4 this is the time to start.

5 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, we will continue
6 to work on that. But I think it's also important,
7 ah, for the DFTA to make sure that we work with you,
8 but to make sure that 10 million is added, um, into
9 the budget, ah, for our senior center, so that they
10 can, you know, be prepared to meet the new needs that
11 they need to do. I mean, they're doing so much more
12 than what they used to do before. So when we prepare
13 for the senior center, ah, to open, to have more, ah,
14 virtual program and make sure that there's
15 sufficient, um, services we gotta make sure that at
16 least that 10 million should be in there, ah, in the
17 adopted budget. So that, or even more, but at least
18 we, we gotta make sure that money is in there.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Did you get a promise
21 from OMB?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [laughs]

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: On that?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Ah, we, on,
25 on, from OMB what we have around that is, and, and

1
2 I've said this before, I don't think anyone, either
3 in OMB or in this administration is, is aware of
4 that's a commitment. We, we believe that that will
5 be, that will be realized. Um, and it was just this,
6 this change in the financial situation that just set
7 all us back. But this administration is committed to
8 that 10 million, um, being in the, in the, in the
9 adopted budget as we are about looking in the future
10 for RFPs and everything else. All right? So we...

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: OK. We will...

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: ...I will
13 keep this conversation going because it's really,
14 this is your last one and this is my last one, and we
15 want to make sure that we have set a pathway the
16 future that honors the great work you've done for the
17 last eight years, all right? So, um...

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, that...

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: ...and with
20 that I will say goodbye [laughs].

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, not yet. Ah,
22 Council Member Rosenthal...

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member
25 Rosenthal just joined us.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: OK.

3 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: She's, she's chair of
4 the Subcommittee on Capital Projects, so.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: OK. Hi,
6 how are you?

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So you can't leave yet
8 [laughs].

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right,
10 good. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Here we go.
13 It's so nice to see you, Commissioner, so nice to see
14 you, Chair. I'm sure this was an exceptional
15 hearing. I apologize for getting on late. I was, I
16 had another Zoom. But, um, Council Member Chin, I
17 just wanted to pick up on, on sort of something that
18 was just agreed to and, and, and clarify. Um, did I
19 hear, ah, the commissioner say that this
20 administration is, is committed to putting in the 10
21 million dollars?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I, I have,
23 what I can tell you is that everyone is committed to,
24 to working towards getting those 10 million dollars

25

1
2 in, yes. Ah, that is, that is what I know. You
3 know, um...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So there's,
5 there's a critical, um, timing little nuance that
6 will reflect what or not what you're saying is
7 accurate.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [inaudible]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: So if the 10
10 million dollars is put into the mayor's executive
11 budget then reflects commitment. If it doesn't get
12 in until adoption that means the City Council is
13 committed to getting it done, number one, and number
14 two, it means that it's only in for one year. It
15 doesn't get baselined. So I just want to make clear,
16 I sort of, when I jumped in I heard executive and
17 adoption being used interchangeably. They're not
18 interchangeable. It, it, on, in May when the mayor
19 comes out with the executive budget the 10 million
20 will either be in there or it won't. Full stop. If
21 it's in there, I know, I just said that, it reflects
22 an actual commitment by this administration. If it
23 is not in there and Council Member Chin has to, you
24 know, do everything in her power to get that 10
25 million to be part of the negotiated conversation on

1
2 what the final budget is for next year, again, only
3 one year, not baselined, and if I remember correctly
4 this is a, ah, change in the model so there's no way
5 it could just be done for one year. It must be
6 baselined. Then it will be, um, a, a very, ah, sad
7 state of affairs. So I just wanted to make sure
8 everyone understood the distinction between expense,
9 ah, executive budget and adopted budget. Does that
10 make sense, Commissioner?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It does.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: OK.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Council Member
14 Rosenthal, last year it was in the exec budget and
15 then it disappeared in the adopted budget. So,
16 because of what the, because of the economic
17 situation last year, right, and now it's [inaudible].

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Yeah, a couple
19 of things dropped out between exec and, and adopted
20 because the city wasn't able to go to the market to
21 get just basic funds to pay for basic services. I
22 don't think that's gonna happen this year. I really
23 don't. I think it's gonna be more of the exec is
24 gonna reflect the true values of this administration
25 and it'll be, there will be funding for, um, you

1 know, there will either be funding or there won't.
2 So, anyway, thank you so much, um, for that and, and
3 I mean, if there's one thing I can say, Commissioner,
4 is God bless you for doing this work. It's so hard
5 and, you know, we know how important, everyone knows
6 how important seniors are to you, to your agency and,
7 you know, I mean, I'm sure Chair Chin said it a bunch
8 of times, but thank you for fighting the good fight.
9 This has been an incredibly challenging time,
10 something that none of us have ever experienced
11 before. So thank you for that.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you
14 for that. It's my mitzvah. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: [laughs]

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: [laughs]

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you, ah, Council
18 Member Rosenthal. I think we've also been joined by,
19 ah, Council Member Louis. I saw her name. Are there
20 other questions from, ah, council members?

21 MODERATOR: Seeing that there are no
22 council members with their hand raised I'm gonna turn
23 it to the chair for closing remarks.

24 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Um, OK. Commissioner,
25 ah, thank you, and Mr. Mercado, thank you for being

1 here today on this, ah, preliminary budget hearing.

2 And thank you for your partnership, ah, for all these
3 years and we will build on a strong budget so that
4 services for the older adults will have a good
5 future. And, ah, I look forward working with you on
6 this budget to make sure that we get the resources
7 that we need. So we'll continue our advocacy and
8 conversation until it's done. Thank you.

9
10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

11 Bye-bye, everyone.

12 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Ah, so we're gonna go
13 to public testimony.

14 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. We will
15 now turn to public testimony. Once more, I'd like to
16 remind everyone that unlike our typical council
17 hearings we will be calling individuals one by one to
18 testify. Council members who have questions for a
19 particular panelist should use the raise hand
20 function in Zoom and you will be called on after each
21 panel has completed their testimony. For panelists,
22 once your name is called a member of our staff will
23 unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the
24 go-ahead to begin after setting the time. All
25 testimony will be limited to three minutes. Please

1
2 wait for the sergeant to announce that you may begin
3 before delivering your testimony. The first panelist
4 will be Katelyn Andrews from Live On New York, Tara
5 Klein from United Neighborhood Houses, and Beth
6 Finkel from AARP. I will now call on Katelyn Andrews
7 to begin.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 KATELYN ANDREWS: Thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify today. Thank you, Council
11 Member Chin, for holding this hearing. My name is
12 Katelyn Andrews, director of public policy at Live On
13 New York. Our members include more than 100
14 community-based nonprofits that provide core services
15 that make New York a better place to age. For years
16 Live On New York has come to the city prior to budget
17 adoption to highlight the importance of the aging
18 services network. Even with a growing, increasingly
19 diverse older adult population, the chronic
20 underfunding of DFTA has yet to be addressed. In
21 fact, in recent years providers have been promised
22 millions of dollars in funding for senior centers the
23 never came to be allocated, while also experiencing
24 significant cuts and uncertainty to the Indirect Cost
25 Rate initiative. Amidst this, providers confronted a

1
2 pandemic that put older adults at the greatest risk,
3 not only to the virus but to the negative health
4 impacts of social isolation. In response, providers
5 have changed their service models virtually
6 overnight, shifting to reaching clients via phone or
7 web, navigating the new vaccine and food systems, and
8 more. The workers who provided these services are
9 and will also remain essential. They are also
10 predominantly women and people of color who are
11 consistently being disinvested in by our city. But
12 our budget does not reflect all the work that they're
13 doing. Given this, we're advocating for the
14 following. First, I echo the concerns that will, um,
15 I'm sure be raised by my colleagues and has been
16 brought up regarding the Indirect Cost Rate Funding
17 Initiative for FY20 and FY21 and going forward. As a
18 note, the cuts to this program have been particularly
19 severe within DFTA contracts. Like other providers,
20 they received only 60% of the indirect cost rates in
21 FY20. However, DFTA providers only received this
22 amount for seven months of their contracts, with the
23 other five months being neglected. I have one
24 provider who for them this means a cut of \$350,000,
25 \$90,000 of which was due to that five-month gap.

1
2 They've also outlaid money in order to get the
3 approved indirect cost rate and shifted money out of
4 their contracts into the indirect cost rate that has
5 now been underfunded. This cut is significant and it
6 impacts directly nonprofits' ability to continue
7 working and making sure that older adults remain fed,
8 served, and a part of our communities. We also
9 request 16.6 million to be added to the funding
10 available for home-delivered meals in order to
11 increase capacity and meet new demand and increase
12 the per-meal rate that is still not at the national
13 average, despite our calling attention to this for
14 years. Finally, the city must fully allocate the
15 promised 10 million in funding for senior center
16 staff and 5 million in funding for kitchen staff.
17 The were funds promised and, as highlighted by
18 Council Member Chin and Council Member Rosenthal,
19 they have yet to be included. This should not be a
20 part of the budget negotiation and the budget dance.
21 It must be in exec and then fulfilled throughout it.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 KATELYN ANDREWS: Finally, we would,
24 we're looking for a restoration of the COLA, 3%
25 across human service contracts and comprehensive

1
2 emergency pay for human services workers. Thank you
3 for the opportunity to testify today.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you, Katelyn. We will
5 now here from Tara.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 TARA KLEIN: Thank you, Chair Chin and
8 council members for convening today's hearing. My
9 name is Tara Klein. I'm a senior policy analyst with
10 United Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a policy and
11 social change organization representing 40
12 neighborhood settlement houses in New York City.
13 Settlement houses have been on the front lines in
14 meeting older adults' emergency needs during COVID-
15 19, providing them with food, financial benefits,
16 mental health supports, social activities to reduce
17 isolation, and support in getting COVID tests and
18 vaccinations. While we're glad that DFTA's budget
19 did not see cuts in FY22 prelim we need to ensure
20 that funding is increased in targeted ways to ensure
21 older adults can continue to receive lifesaving
22 supports. My written testimony includes many more
23 details and I just want to summarize the points here.
24 First, we need to include the 10 million dollars in
25 model budget funding for senior centers. This is a

1
2 broken promise from FY2018. It was supposed to be
3 there last year. This funding is truly urgent this
4 year. We also need to include the 5 million dollars
5 in additional funding for senior center kitchen
6 staff. This is budgeted. Last year it was also
7 budgeted but it was delayed at the last minute. We
8 can't see that happen again. We do fear that these
9 budget cuts may be indicative of a misperception in
10 the city, that senior centers have been closed during
11 COVID, even though we know they've all pivoted to
12 remote work and they're doing really tremendous work
13 to serve older people. Next, we need to invest 16.6
14 million dollars in the home-delivered meal program.
15 This program is so successful and popular in
16 providing nutritious meals to homebound seniors, but
17 it's been significantly underfunded for years.
18 There's been higher demand for this program during
19 COVID and we need to bring HDM up to the national
20 average cost of a meal. And we need to stop the
21 policy of switching older adults who qualify for
22 home-delivered meals into GetFood, which does not
23 include social services and is inferior-quality food.
24 Next, we need to restore funding to the NORC program,
25 including council funding from nursing services.

1 Thank you for that support for the last two years for
2 NORCs. We also need to look to enhance NORC staff
3 salaries by at least 1.7 million dollars. This will
4 help ensure parity with other DFTA-funded contracts.
5 Next, we need to restore and increase DOHMH's
6 geriatric mental health initiative to 2.86 million
7 dollars. Ah, this is going to help expand services
8 and meet older adults' mental health needs over the
9 last year that have grown, including reported
10 increases in feelings of depression, anxiety, and
11 isolation. We need to restore and baseline all
12 recurring one-year administration funds and council
13 aging initiatives to at least their FY20 levels,
14 reversing last year's cuts. That includes restoring
15 the Healthy Aging initiative. And we need to fully
16 fund the indirect cost rate initiative and, ah,
17 support the new in-services sector through a 3% COLA.
18 Ah, and finally we, ah, continue to call on the
19 administration to delay the older adult center RFP.
20 This is not the time. There is such a lack of
21 certainty about the future. There is a need to focus
22 on vaccination right now. And there are only about
23 three months left...

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25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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2 TARA KLEIN: ...until new contracts are
3 expected to begin. At this point this is not
4 sufficient. So thank you very much for the
5 opportunity to testify. I'm happy to elaborate more
6 or answer questions.

7 MODERATOR: Thank you, Tara. We will now
8 hear from Beth Finkel.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 BETH FINKEL: Hi. First of all, Council
11 Member Chin, I just want to say eight years, it just
12 utterly takes my breath away. You have, um, left us
13 such a wonderful legacy and, ah, you've set the mark
14 for future, ah, chairs of Aging, and I love that
15 you're gonna keep fighting for us this last year and
16 have an even greater lasting legacy. So we, we thank
17 you so much. We salute you. Um, I'm Beth Finkel.
18 I'm the state director for AARP New York. In New
19 York City we have over three-quarters of a million
20 members, across New York State over 2-1/2 million
21 members. And so we really feel like we need to weigh
22 in on the budget for 2022. Ah, we've been hearing
23 from everyone about the issues and we agree. So I'm
24 just gonna hit on the strong points. But the most
25 important point, which I know people have said I've

1
2 got to say it again. Less than half of 1% of New
3 York City's budget is allocated for older adults and
4 that is unconscionable. We have to start right from
5 there at the get-go. It is the biggest number of
6 growth of any demographic group and yet the
7 percentage of the budget never improves. It's kind
8 of like a total disregard, and we all need to wake up
9 or we're gonna end up with a lot of older adults who
10 are in really very, very poor condition and are going
11 to be, ah, more of a drain on all of our, um,
12 institutions, which we really can't have. We all
13 know that the onset of COVID-19 has made everything
14 worse. I'm not gonna go over that. You know how
15 older adults have been particularly been affected.
16 And we also know the valiant efforts of social
17 service networks and the senior service providers
18 that many of our, of those colleagues are on this
19 call with me today. So I was gonna hit the high
20 points here. First of all, we need to invest 16.6
21 million in additional funding for home-delivered
22 meals. Second, we, we need to call on the city to
23 allocate that 10 million dollars in funding for
24 senior centers and it must be baseline, as Council
25 Member Rosenthal's point about the executive budget

1 is so key to this. We also need 5 million dollars in
2 funding senior center kitchen staff in the FY22.
3 Third, we call upon the city to expand funding for
4 senior centers and other DFTA providers to improve
5 with their technology infrastructure. I think we've
6 heard that again and again. Fourth, we recommend
7 that the city continue to preserve discretionary and
8 one-time executive funding in FY22. And last, we
9 want to really voice AARP's concern about the chronic
10 underfunding of human service contracts with not-for-
11 profit providers, especially with regard to providers
12 of aging-related services. The 3% indirect cost rate
13 funding initiative really is so important to allow
14 the COLA for employees, ah, not to, not to expire and
15 to renew for 2021.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 BETH FINKEL: OK. So we believe these
19 investments in the FY22 budget will help New York
20 City's 50-plus residents recover from the current
21 crisis and improve their livelihoods as well as their
22 well-being, and ensure that the city's network of
23 aging-related not-profits and senior providers have
24 the financial stability to continue to bear out this
25 storm and to arise from it stronger and even more

1
2 productive than they already have been, and thank you
3 all again.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you to
5 that, that panel. This is a reminder to all of the
6 council members that if you would like, like to ask
7 questions of this panel please use the Zoom raise
8 hand function. Thank you. So I will now be calling
9 on, seeing that no council members have their hand
10 raised, I will now call on the next, um, group of
11 panelists. Molly Krakowski, from JASA, Melissa
12 Sklarz from SAGE, and Ravi Reddi from the Asian
13 American Senior Community. We will, we will begin
14 with Molly.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: Hi. Ah, thank you so
17 much, Chair Chin and members of the Aging Community
18 for the opportunity to testify today. Um, JASA is a
19 nonprofit organization serving over 40,000 older New
20 Yorkers. Um, we are very appreciative of the council
21 and especially Council Member Chin for your
22 leadership of the Aging Committee and your continued
23 support of aging services and the needs of the human
24 services sector. Your leadership and budget
25 negotiations last year and your continued focus on

1 the needs of older New Yorkers this year have been
2 critical in the city's response to COVID-19 and, and
3 keeping the spotlight on older New Yorkers. JASA's
4 budget request and priorities for FY22 are tied to
5 their funding of social service contracts in New York
6 City. We're looking to the city to fully fund New
7 York City contracts and to honor the indirect rates
8 that were approved prior to the FY21 budget, and to
9 keep all the critical New York City Council
10 initiatives supporting senior services, such as the
11 NORC initiative, Support our Seniors, DOVE, digital
12 inclusion, and Su CASA, and extend the executive
13 funding that has replaced some of those, um, NORC,
14 NORC funding that were previously funded exclusively
15 by the City Council. Um, over the course of the past
16 year, ah, JASA did a full pivot. We've been
17 providing thousands of telephone calls and remote
18 services and classes and coordinating all sorts of,
19 um, programs remotely, um, and online. Our homecare
20 workers, our home-delivered meal staff continue
21 providing daily deliveries. Ah, our community
22 guardian and adult protective service staff continued
23 meeting with clients, and just to give you a sense
24 APS, um, staff managed 4400 referrals and conducted
25

1 9700 face-to-face visits between March and January.

2 Um, so those people have continued throughout being a

3 face in the community. Um, I, we are very closely

4 working with the city and with DFTA in all

5 vaccination efforts, including in our Section 202 HUD

6 housing, where we've vaccinated over a thousand of

7 our 2200 tenants in conjunction with CVS Clinic. Ah,

8 in FY22 and in planning for the future we need to

9 think about services in terms of broader delivery

10 strategies. The city has to ensure that older

11 adults, older adults have the technology to connect

12 to services and the City Council funds can't be used

13 for devices. The city has to make those devices

14 available and, ah, and the supports for those

15 services. Beyond technology, I want to focus on

16 indirect costs. JASA had been approved for the new

17 indirect rate like other service providers. We lost

18 nearly \$500,000 in FY20. We still don't know three-

19 quarters of the way through this year what our

20 indirect rate is for the current year. We need the

21 indirect rate put in place. Just to give you a

22 sense, our accounting department has been submitting

23 and resubmitting numerous budget modifications

24 throughout the year.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MOLLY KRAKOWSKI: The HR department has been doing PPE and staff-related changes every time there's a change in what is required and what the, um, what we need to do with staff and how they can take time off and what to do about staff that's been exposed. It's the amount IT support, and this is all indirect, the amount of IT support to manage a fully remote, hundreds of, hundreds of workers, um, and programming is tremendous. And so, um, I know we're out of time, but I really want to thank you for the opportunity to testify, um, and to put that indirect front and center as a commitment that the city made, um, as we move into the, um, FY22 negotiations and, and I hope it will be in the executive budget, um, to fix the, the current situation, 'cause it's a, a real need. Thank you so much, and thank you for all these years of chairing.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you, Molly.

Next we will be hearing from Melissa Sklarz.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MELISSA SKLARZ: Thank you. Sklarz, Sklarz. Ah, so, um, my name is Melissa Sklarz. I am, um, with SAGE, the oldest and largest, ah,

1 organization to improve the lives of LGBT elders.
2 Thank you, ah, Chairperson Margaret Chin. You are a
3 fierce warrior for us all. Thank you, Beth Finkel.
4 A half of 1% funding, um, awful. Um, hopefully that
5 will improve. LGBT elders are more invisible, they
6 are more disconnected. Thin support networks, less
7 family support, more likely to live alone, half as
8 likely to be partnered, four times less likely to
9 have children to support them as they age. LGBT
10 elders in New York depend upon community service
11 providers, such as SAGE. Ah, our community has more
12 poverty, more health issues, um, more bad health.
13 COVID has exasperated all this. It has, we are, we
14 have lost our people and our constituency. Um, what
15 we have done with SAGE is we have created LGBT-
16 friendly affordable senior housing. We have done
17 this at Stonewall House in Fort Green in Brooklyn.
18 We have done this in Crotona Pride House in East
19 Tremont in the Bronx. 145 units in Brooklyn, 83
20 units in the Bronx. Both are anchored by SAGE
21 centers. In Brooklyn it's 6800 square feet. In the
22 Bronx it will be over 10,000 square feet. We have
23 state-of-the-art services, quality programming. We
24 have personnel on the ground available, not only to
25

1 residents but for all elders in the neighborhood.
2 Both of these, um, will join our network of six
3 different, um, SAGE centers throughout the city.
4 They will be a beacon. Ah, COVID has forced us to
5 bring all of our programming online. Ah, we have, in
6 spite of COVID, created new programs such as SAGE
7 Send to help elders with their finances and SAGE
8 Connect to fight isolation and connect them with
9 trained volunteers. Ah, we've even helped with, ah,
10 vaccine appointments, something that was unimaginable
11 as recently as two years ago. I'm here today to ask
12 the council in their endless support of us for
13 restoration of our funding. Our SAGE centers, um,
14 especially the new ones in, in Brooklyn and the, and
15 the Bronx, ah, will be everything that all of our
16 other centers have been. They will provide people,
17 community, places to go, support. Um, and they will
18 grow and it will be like a, a pebble in a pond.
19 It'll ripple out, ah, throughout the rest of the
20 neighborhood, and, um, and support this. So the
21 council has been great. I, I look forward. You have
22 all my written information. I don't have to go into
23 the numbers now, um, and thank you again, Margaret
24 Chin.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON AGING 96
2 MODERATOR: Thank you, thank you. Next
3 we will hear from Ravi Reddi.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 RAVI REDDI: Hi. I want to thank this
6 committee for holding this hearing and giving the
7 Asian American Federation the opportunity to testify
8 on the needs of our senior community and our senior
9 service providers. Thank you so much, Chair Chin,
10 for your years of constant activity and vocal support
11 for our community. It's truly appreciated. I'm Ravi
12 Reddi, the associate director of advocacy and policy
13 at the Asian American Federation. If anything, this
14 fiscal year's budget will need to support a city that
15 is at once in the grips of a pandemic and
16 simultaneously recovering from it. And the dollars
17 should first flow to the communities and the
18 populations most vulnerable and most impacted in
19 both. That's why we're here today. We're here
20 because 13% of the city's senior population are now
21 Asian. Among our seniors, one in four Asian New
22 Yorkers live in poverty and 72% of Asian seniors have
23 limited English proficiency and comprise more than
24 two-thirds of the senior population in many
25 neighborhoods across Brooklyn and Queens.

1 Additionally, one in four LEPC Asian seniors in the
2 city do not have access to the internet at home.

3 This budget must address the importance of increasing
4 direct service capacity in our community during the
5 pandemic. We're seeing challenges because of the
6 sheer number of languages spoken in our homes and the
7 accompanying lack of accessibility to vital
8 information. Considering the high poverty and LEP
9 rates among our seniors, having access to services is
10 extremely difficult and compounds the existing
11 isolation that many are already struggling with.

12 Asian seniors, many of whom are immigrants, have a
13 greater need for access to these programs, in part
14 due to the continued after-effects of the previous
15 administration's public charge assault. In addition,
16 the city must fund an emergency network of
17 linguistically and culturally competent food service
18 programs and connect Asian seniors to these
19 alternative food benefits in order to begin to
20 address the harm inflicted on this population by the
21 loss of access to traditional government assistance
22 programs and shortcomings in culturally competent
23 city services. And while Asian New Yorkers comprise
24 at least 10% of the population in more than half of
25

1 the city districts, while the other half have some of
2 the fastest-growing Asian populations, from fiscal
3 year 2002 to 2014 the Asian American community
4 received a mere 1.4% of the total dollar value of New
5 York City's social service contracts, a reflection of
6 a broader long-term trend. But our senior service
7 member agencies are working beyond capacity in
8 support of our elders and they're creating and
9 innovating processes to make sure our seniors are
10 getting it services they need as efficiently and
11 safely as possible. One example is using meal
12 delivery service to conduct mental health wellness
13 checks with trained volunteers in Queens or sourcing
14 culturally competent food from farmers growing the
15 Asian vegetables in Brooklyn. From May to November
16 alone AAF helps six senior-serving organizations who
17 serve almost 3000 seniors with nearly 20,000 food
18 services and 8500 assurance calls. Nevertheless, as
19 City Council works on this year's budget, council
20 members must keep in mind the persistent inequities
21 in city contracting practices and the systemic
22 barriers facing our community-based organizations
23 [inaudible]...

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1 RAVI REDDI: ...seeking the dollars the
2 council is allocating for this year. Contracting
3 processes must prioritize the CBOs that have the
4 expertise needed to make the most of every dollar in
5 our communities by giving greater weight to
6 organizations with demonstrated track records of
7 serving low-income, underserved imaging communities
8 with linguistic and cultural competency. Our CBOs
9 are leading by example in the provision of direct
10 services from providing wrap-around services that
11 include mental wellness checks to allying with food
12 suppliers that provide culturally competent food.
13 With the looming budget cuts our advocacy efforts and
14 budget ask is that our nonprofits be provided with
15 enough resources to protect essential services to
16 support our elders. We understand the city is in
17 dire financial straits, but CBOs have led by example
18 in how to spend city dollars effectively and this
19 moment presents an opportunity for this City Council
20 to show that New York City can still lead by example
21 in protecting its most vulnerable. We're the Asian
22 American Federation. Thank you for allowing us to
23 testify, and look forward to working with all of you
24
25

1
2 to make sure our senior communities get the support
3 they deserve. Thank you.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you to this
5 panel. Seeing that no council members have their
6 hands raised, ah, Chair Chin?

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I just wanted to
8 thank the, the last two panel, um, the advocacy
9 organization and the service provider, for all your
10 great work, especially during the pandemic in serving
11 our seniors and the most vulnerable seniors. And I
12 look forward to working with you to make sure that we
13 get a strong budget this year, that we could increase
14 more. Hey, get us to 1% at least, right, to start
15 off with. Ah, so we gotta continue to advocate. I
16 urge all of you, ah, to also reach out, ah, to other
17 council member, council members', ah, district that
18 you serve to help us with this, ah, advocacy, because
19 we can't do it just by ourselves. We need, I need
20 all my colleague on board, colleagues on the budget
21 negotiation team and, you know, colleagues across
22 from all districts. So get your members, ah, to help
23 us and, um, to get the support. Thank you.

24 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. Seeing
25 that no other council members, um, have their hand

1
2 raised to ask questions I will now call on our next
3 panel. The next panel will be Rhonda Soberman from
4 the Visiting Nurse Services of New York, Rachel
5 Sherrow from City Meals on Wheels, and Kimberly
6 George from Project Guardianship. We will first
7 begin with Rhonda Soberman.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.
9 Rhonda, you're muted.

10 RHONDA SOBERMAN: OK, can you hear me?

11 MODERATOR: Yes, we can hear you.

12 RHONDA SOBERMAN: OK. Good morning,
13 Chair Chin and members of the City Council. My name
14 is Rhonda Soberman. I'm from the Visiting Nurse
15 Service of New York, and I appreciate the opportunity
16 to testify today. I want to share the importance of
17 the work VNSNY is doing with our [inaudible]
18 retirement community program partners in 30 New York
19 programs coverage 22 New York City Council districts,
20 as well as our work as, at the VNSNY-sponsored
21 Chinatown neighborhood NORC. In order to continue
22 this important work the Visiting Nurse Service of New
23 York and our NORC partners are asking the New York
24 City Council to reallocate the 1.3 million in funding
25 for all NORC nursing services. VNSNY touches the

1
2 lives of more than 44,000 patients and health care
3 members each day through a wide range of programs in
4 the, all at home, for people in their homes. Um, in
5 our 125-year history we've been there to support
6 communities in some of the biggest public health and
7 natural emergencies, and COVID-19 hasn't been any
8 different. Since March 2020 we've cared for more
9 than 5000 COVID-positive New Yorkers in their home.
10 The world has dramatically changed and the services
11 delivered by our NORC nurses have become even more
12 critical for seniors living in NORC locations today.
13 By the end of the fiscal year will, we will have
14 provided more than 12,000 of NORC nursing services.
15 The council's funding enabled our NORC nurses to
16 assist seniors through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our
17 goal was to help seniors, especially with chronic
18 health conditions, by communicating the most updated
19 information to them and helping them to avoid
20 unnecessary emergency room visits and
21 hospitalizations, which would have put them at
22 greater risk. The pandemic has made it abundantly
23 clear more seniors with greater healthcare needs will
24 get their care in their homes instead of in
25 healthcare facilities. And NORC nurses continue to

1 support, ah, these seniors to get the right care when
2 and where they need it. When doctors and other
3 healthcare provider offices were closed or operating
4 under reduced hours, our nurses stepped in to provide
5 important guidance and support. We also support our
6 NORC partners' request for 1.7 million in funding to
7 address the NORC salary parity for the DFTA-funded
8 NORCs. In summary, we urge the City Council to renew
9 the 1.3 million in funding for NORC nursing services
10 and provide salary parity for NORC social service
11 providers so that we can continue to support the
12 critically important and very successful NORC
13 program. We look forward to working with the council
14 to ensure that our seniors have the appropriate
15 nursing and social services they deserve. Obviously,
16 my remarks were much reduced. Um, we'll be sending
17 you, you know, more detailed information in our
18 written communications. And I want to thank you,
19 Chair Chin, for your leadership over these years.
20 It's been a pleasure, and we look forward to fighting
21 with you to get whatever you need so we can help our
22 seniors. Thanks again.

24 MODERATOR: Thank you, Rhonda. Next we
25 will be hearing from Rachel Sherrow.

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 RACHEL SHERROW: Ah, hi. Just to, um,
3 pile on what everybody else has been saying, um, I
4 would like to begin by thanking you, um, Chair Chin,
5 um, for your compassionate dedication and, and
6 advocacy throughout the years, um, and for dignity
7 and greater support of senior services and for City
8 Meals on Wheels. We certainly appreciate that. And,
9 again, a shout-out to Beth's statistics, which I know
10 but when I hear it over and over it's just mind-
11 blowing, especially, you know, following my, my
12 colleagues what they've all talked about, this is the
13 fastest-growing population. Ah, I can't say it
14 enough. And we also, I just want to talk about a
15 couple of things. I want to begin by reflecting on
16 the anniversary of the pandemic and describe what did
17 at City Meals. Ah, we were prepared and ready. We
18 delivered our first emergency meals on March 5, at
19 least a week before the city shut down, because we
20 were concerned something might happen, um, which
21 would necessitate having food on hand for our most
22 vulnerable older adults. That's what we do and what
23 we want to be able to continue to do now and in the
24 future regardless of the emergency or the crisis. I
25

1
2 also want to state the fact that City Meals, along
3 with our partners and advocates, many of whom have
4 been in this hearing all day, have been consistently
5 lobbying for the support of aging services, which are
6 continually under-funded and under-supported, despite
7 the growing population. Um, we really want to, um,
8 emphasize how important home-delivered meals are.
9 Throughout the, the pandemic the services remained
10 seamless, even when the city shut down, um, services.
11 And as a sector, aging providers have always known
12 how critical our services are, but not, not more so
13 than in the current environment, when Meals on Wheels
14 staff are literally essential workers, making sure
15 the recipients don't go without food or a friendly
16 face, risking their own lives to maintain a lifeline
17 for our elderly neighbors. Ah, most crucial is the
18 situation we currently obviously find our vulnerable
19 and hungry older adult neighbors in. We know that
20 our population is needy and hungry throughout the
21 year pre, pre-COVID, during COVID, and it will
22 continue. Home-delivered meals is so essential in
23 ensuring at least one nutritious meal a day is avail
24 to consume. Reliance on home-delivered meals, as
25 everyone else has talked about, has only increased

1 since the pandemic and reassured, has reassured many
2 new, ah, recipients that they're not forgotten. We
3 just really want to, um, underscore how much, um,
4 DFTA needs more support in, in home-delivered meals
5 and obviously when senior centers reopen. We're
6 requesting \$500,000 for emergency supplemental meals
7 for FY22 to ensure that homebound older adults have
8 enough food on hand in case of a disruption in
9 service. We know how to do this. We've been doing
10 it all year, and we've been doing it for decades.
11 Um, we also want to, um, support the 25 million
12 dollars in reauthorized emergency meals funding, of
13 which we were lucky enough to get some of it, in
14 order to continue the work with do with a population
15 not served by any other emergency feeding group. And
16 as we move through our incredible 40th year we thank
17 you as our partners. And I did forget to say my
18 name. It's Rachel Sherrow, and I'm the associate
19 executive director at City Meals, and I thank you
20 very much for this opportunity. And we will be out
21 there to help you, ah, no matter what you need from
22 us.

24 MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you,
25 Rachel. We will now hear from Kimberly George.

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 KIMBERLY GEORGE: Hi. I'm Kimberly
3 George, the president of Project Guardianship. We
4 were found by the Vera Institute of Justice 16 years
5 ago. Our agency serves as the legal guardian for
6 older adults and individuals living with disabilities
7 and cognitive disorders, such as Alzheimer's. The
8 people we serve need help making decisions and have
9 no family or friends to help them. Most are older
10 adults. 76% are 61 or older. And most are low
11 income and living below the poverty line. Since
12 COVID hit a year ago we have continued to be on the
13 front lines working to keep our clients, who are very
14 high risk for serious illness and death from COVID,
15 safe and not isolated. We make sure that clients
16 have all the, um, vital basics - food, money,
17 medicine, supplies, housing security, home health
18 care, and medical and mental health care. For
19 clients in nursing homes we oversee their care,
20 medical interventions and surgeries, and we ensure
21 that end-of-life decisions are made in line with
22 their wishes. Unfortunately, we lost 29 clients to
23 COVID. All but three were living in nursing homes.
24 At Project Guardianship every client has a dedicated
25

1 team of an attorney, a case manager, a finance
2 manager, property manager, and benefits
3 administrator, who work together to ensure that
4 clients live safely and with the greatest quality of
5 life. We serve clients in all five boroughs of New
6 York City and are available to them 365 days a year,
7 24 hours a day. There is great need for, for Project
8 Guardianship to serve this population. Courts have
9 difficulty finding private guardians willing to serve
10 low-income clients who have little or no ability to
11 pay for the guardianship. This is especially true
12 from the court's hardest-to-serve cases with
13 complicated issues that require a great deal of time
14 and expertise, um, such as clients with multiple
15 health challenges, along with issues of elder abuse,
16 housing insecurity, eviction proceedings, deed
17 thefts, foreclosures, and difficult family dynamics.
18 Project Guardianship accepts cases regardless of the
19 ability to pay or the complexity of the case.
20 Protecting and caring for people in need of
21 protective arrangements needs to be a top priority.
22 Our request for continued funding from the New York
23 City Council for fiscal year 2020, both from Support
24 our Seniors and the speaker's initiative, will be
25

1 used to maintain and hopefully increase our services.
2 Unfortunately, we lost 30% of our City Council
3 funding, ah, because of COVID's ramifications on the
4 budget in 2021. Um, I want to thank the City Council
5 for its support over the years and for being a
6 champion for guardianship to the funding it allocates
7 to Project Guardianship. City Council support is
8 critical for us because other funding sources for
9 this service are scarce. The guardianship system
10 relies on the person under guardianship having assets
11 to pay for their guardian. The publicly funded
12 guardian programs in New York City are only
13 accessible for people in adult protective service
14 system. So people without resources for home
15 hospitals, nursing homes, neighbors, um, who make the
16 petition, they have no public guardian option. We
17 therefore are requesting that our funding be restored
18 to fiscal year 2020 levels. Funding will provide...

19
20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 KIMBERLY GEORGE: ...benefits to the
22 community because we specialize in helping clients
23 remain in their home or return home from a nursing
24 home. Nearly 60% of our clients live in their own
25 homes. Thank you to the City Council members, um,

1
2 Chair Chin, um, and the committee for inviting me to
3 testify today.

4 MODERATOR: Thank you. Seeing that no
5 council members have their hand raised, I will now
6 turn it over next, oh, Chair Chin.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Oh, I just wanted to
8 really thank the panel, um, this panel. Um, I know,
9 you know, Visiting Nurse Service, the great work that
10 you do, um, the neighborhood NORC in my district and
11 the nursing services. The nursing services should be
12 paid by the state. But the state, you know,
13 [inaudible]. Why are we paying for it? Um, I think
14 a lot of it is really advocating and make sure that
15 the state, ah, give us the, the fair amount of money
16 that we deserve. Um, and City Meals, thank you for
17 your service during the COVID. I know that you are
18 also helping, you know, with the distributing
19 vaccine, um, information. I mean, this is the
20 infrastructure that we have already and that's why we
21 kept advocating with the city, utilizing our senior
22 service providers, ah, to get information out to
23 seniors, ah, on the pandemic, on how to get a
24 vaccine. It's [inaudible]. They gotta just provide
25 the resources and the support. So thank you to this

1
2 panel, ah, for your hard work and, ah, we gotta work
3 together to make sure that we have a strong budget.
4 Thank you.

5 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. I will now
6 call on the next panel, next and final panel. Olivia
7 Cothren from the Queens Botanical Garden, Dr. Cynthia
8 Maurer from the Visiting Neighbors, Inc. Bing Ji
9 from Village New NORC, Wesley Davis from New York
10 Roadrunners, and Wendell Walters from the Osborne
11 Association. We will first begin with Olivia.

12 Olivia?

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 OLIVIA COTHREN: Thank you so much, Chair
15 Chin and members of the committee for welcoming here
16 to speak today. My name is Olivia Cothren. I am the
17 director of development at Queens Botanical Garden,
18 the place where people, plants, and cultures meet.
19 If you don't know us, we're a 39-acre botanical
20 garden and cultural institution, ah, right on Main
21 Street in Flushing, Queens, and I'm here today to
22 share a little bit about what we've been doing to
23 serve our seniors throughout COVID, and really just
24 to show support to your work and to all the other
25 panelists that we've heard from so far. So QBG and

1
2 our fellow cultural institutions have contributed to
3 public life, public health, and public service for
4 all New Yorkers, ah, in many different ways
5 throughout COVID. So at Queens Botanical Garden we
6 have been doing things like, ah, donating food grown
7 on our farm to New Yorkers in need. We've been
8 hosting flu shot events. We've been doing virtual
9 programming. But really the way that we have served
10 our senior community throughout COVID is by being
11 this open space for seniors to come and to gather in
12 a socially distant, safe way with others, ah,
13 throughout the pandemic and especially since we
14 reopened on July 21 and have been open the whole time
15 since then. So as an outdoor cultural institution we
16 really are one of the few places where seniors have
17 been able to come, see friends, take a walk, and just
18 feel like they're in a safe, beautiful outdoor space,
19 um, over the last few months. And every single day
20 we have, ah, tai chi at the garden. I know that was
21 spoken about earlier, so we have groups of, um, tai
22 chi, ah, practitioners who come to the garden and,
23 you know, we also have seniors every day, day in and
24 day out, just coming to take a walk with a friend,
25 just admiring the beauty of the garden and the safe

1 oasis that it provides for the community of Flushing
2 and Queens, and really all New Yorkers. Nearly 50%
3 of our membership is at the senior level, so we, we
4 really are a critical resource for seniors,
5 especially in our neighborhood, who can walk to the
6 garden. We're right on, on Main Street, and, um,
7 really a place to combat that social isolation that
8 we've heard spoken about, as well as that many
9 seniors are experiencing, um, throughout this year
10 now more than ever. We also offer extensive
11 volunteer opportunities for seniors. One of our most
12 long-standing volunteer partners is the Retired and
13 Senior Volunteer Program, RSVP, through the Community
14 Service Society of New York. We usually have 25
15 seniors volunteering through that program every year.
16 We still had one active senior through that program
17 over the past year. We have others who are waiting
18 to be vaccinated and then they've expressed that they
19 want to come back to the garden, contribute their
20 time, um, give back to the garden, and really, so we
21 just wanted to share, um, how much our seniors mean
22 to the garden and really just show support for your
23 work and know that culture...

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25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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OLIVIA COTHREN: ...[inaudible] as well.

So thank you for the opportunity.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you,
Olivia. We'll now hear from Dr. Cynthia Maurer.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

MODERATOR: Dr. Cynthia? We, we cannot,
can you, ah, we cannot hear. OK, now you
[inaudible].

DR. CYNTHIA MAURER: OK, got it, good.

Ah, the park is gorgeous, by the way. Um, name is
Cynthia Maurer, ah, with Visiting Neighbors, and I
want to thank Margaret Chin and the council for being
tremendous, um, supporters of us. First of all, I
want to let you know that because of your support we
were still able to be here. We were on the front
lines from the beginning of this pandemic. We were
go, go, go, go. Our volunteers were active and
connected to the seniors. We worked with 1400
seniors and many of them weren't our clients. We
serve about a thousand people. We took on other, new
people through this pandemic that needed help.
Seniors were frightened. They were nervous. It's
unbelievable how much has happened. It's been
basically a whirlwind. But because of the support we

1
2 were able to provide telephone reassurance and not
3 just a check-in call. We had those. Are you OK? Is
4 everything all right? But tremendous amount of
5 counseling and support. People were depressed.
6 People were upset. People didn't have accurate
7 information. So we were getting that information to
8 them and we were assigning volunteers based on their
9 skill set to the seniors. We took seniors on
10 therapeutic walks because they were getting stir
11 crazy. We did a lot of protection in terms of
12 teaching them about using PPE, um, and getting them
13 the supplies in the first place. Volunteers stood on
14 food pantry lines. They went and worked with local,
15 um, restaurants who had extra food, and picked up
16 supplies and gave them to seniors. The volunteers
17 did things far beyond that we normally would do.
18 Like the little engine we, that could, we got up at,
19 over every single hill. But we did it because we had
20 the financial fuel that the council and of course
21 that senior initiative enhancement, ah, that Margaret
22 Chin helped us get, enabled us to be here for our
23 people. Our clients are amongst the oldest old, 85-
24 plus. We have, 75% are over 80, 33% are over 90, 90%
25 live alone, 97% are on limited fixed incomes. Most

1
2 of our seniors are not in a position to have family
3 or friends around. Um, 90% of them are isolated and
4 alone, and we were a lifeline, a connection family.
5 Volunteers really were the true testament of how
6 fabulous New York can be and how incredibly
7 resilient. But, again, we wouldn't have been able to
8 be here without that support. So, first of all,
9 first and foremost, thank you for enabling us to
10 continue, to be here in our 49th year. I keep saying
11 48 because I can't believe how much has happened,
12 sort of this year is a tremendous blur. Um, but we
13 provided friendly visiting. We did it in very
14 clever, unique ways - mailings, cheer up mailings,
15 sympathy cards, a lot of grief counseling and support
16 because these seniors and volunteers needed it. We
17 had a volunteer...

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 DR. CYNTHIA MAURER: ...who basically was
20 so freaked out, she opened her door one day, screamed
21 out, and then left, and we were like what was that?
22 We ran after her with a bar of chocolate, threw her
23 bar of chocolate from six distance, six-foot
24 distance, and she said thank you. She just needed to
25 be able to vent. Being there for people is very

1 important. I'd like to end on one quote. We asked
2 seniors for advice. We wanted to engage them in
3 meaningful activity, and we've been collecting advice
4 from seniors. And one 101-year-old said, "Take good
5 care of yourself. You never know how long you'd be
6 on this planet. I would have taken better care of
7 myself had I known I'd live this long." Our eldest
8 client was 107. She managed to get through the
9 pandemic. At 107 in mid December she passed, in her
10 own home, in her own bed. We should all be so lucky.
11 So thank you for your support. Please continue to do
12 so. We need it. We need you. And our seniors need
13 us.
14

15 MODERATOR: Thank you. We will now be
16 hearing from Bing Ji.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

18 BING JI: OK, allow me to, it's so hard
19 to follow that. Thank you, Dr. Cynthia. It's such a
20 lovely story. Um, good afternoon, Chair Chin and
21 members of the City Council. Ah, thank you, Chair
22 Chin, for years of dedication to the older adults
23 community and your leadership. There are so many
24 great stories out there. Um, my name is Bing. Uh, I
25 am the program director of the Village View NORC and

1 One is Together program at University Settlement.
2 For 135 years University Settlement has provided
3 holistic community programming for families,
4 neighbors across Manhattan and Brooklyn. The city
5 must increase mental health funding so we can expand
6 our mental health programming so more older adults
7 can access it. Older adults not, are not monoliths
8 and DFTA needs more funding and more flexibility for
9 organizations to come up with their own program
10 models. Right now because DFTA places clinicians in
11 senior centers in the mental health initiative, ah,
12 only see seniors who have access to senior centers
13 will get the actual services. And citywide only a
14 small number of eligible older adults actually go to
15 senior centers. With more funding we could expand
16 the programming to reach those older adults who do
17 not come to senior centers, who go to gardens. And,
18 importantly, we must [inaudible] funding to reach
19 homebound older adults. As we all know, the COVID-19
20 pandemic has meant a full year of isolation for
21 elders. And we move closer, as we move closer to
22 controlling the physical dangers of the virus, the
23 mental and emotional results of this past difficult
24 year will continue. Over five years ago University
25

1
2 Settlement developed our own [inaudible] for older
3 adult initiative that provides a continuum of
4 critical mental health care embedded within our
5 existing programs. Our initiative has a team of four
6 modeling [inaudible], ah, clinicians with cross-
7 cultural backgrounds and the expertise, which helps
8 us ensure older adults are more comfortable with
9 mental health programming, making our programming
10 more effective. And with our experience we believe
11 contacts should be, contracts should be allowed to
12 prefer providers more flexibility. For example,
13 currently DFTA places clinicians at senior centers,
14 which is understandably helpful for providers without
15 mental health resources. But as University
16 Settlement has our own mental health consultation
17 center with treating clinicians and a physician on
18 staff, we believe [inaudible] existing staff and
19 resources would only further strengthen our program.
20 Indeed, our smooth in Settlement house referral
21 system has enhanced our ability to provide additional
22 or continued mental health support for many older
23 adult participants. Additionally, we are concerned
24 that DFTA is the city agency with the smallest amount
25 of funding, even as the older adult population is

1
2 increasing across the city. Over the next years we
3 hope that the city will increase DFTA's budget to
4 serve the growing population and close cooperation,
5 ah, and the...

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 BING JI: ...and lastly we, we, thank you,
8 we echo nonprofits in calling out the city to fulfill
9 its indirect rate commitment. Ah, thank you for your
10 time. You'll find more details in my written
11 testimony.

12 MODERATOR: Thank you, Bing. Next we
13 will be hearing from Wesley Davis.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time starts now.

15 WESLEY DAVIS: Ah, thank you, everyone.
16 First I want to say good afternoon to Chair Chin, um,
17 other, ah, City Council members, and my peers. My
18 name is Wesley Davis and I am the, ah, assistant
19 manager for the New York Roadrunners Striders
20 program. Ah, New York Roadrunners Striders program
21 is a senior walking and fitness program, um, at New
22 York Roadrunners. New York Roadrunners aims to help
23 inspire people to [inaudible]. To extend that
24 mission NYRR Striders offers free [inaudible] fitness
25 sessions geared towards improvement and towards fit

1 exercise by making it more accessible for older
2 adults. Our program also promotes cultivation of
3 increased social connections through a variety of
4 classes, events, and resources. By [inaudible]
5 strength and flexibility exercises and fitness
6 activities in our walking and running and exercise
7 sessions our program is, is inclusive and can help
8 improve the quality of everyone through its virtual
9 and in-person offerings. Over the last 10 years NYRR
10 Striders has demonstrated that anyone, no matter age
11 or ability, can be active. In response to the
12 pandemic and keeping the safety of our community as
13 our top priority, NYRR Striders launched our new free
14 online resources, NYRR Striders At Home. The virtual
15 platform provides physical literacy-based activities
16 that are safe to practice under space constraints and
17 social distancing guidelines. NYRR Striders At Home
18 includes live stream fitness classes, call-in fitness
19 classes, on-demand videos, and printed material.
20 Through these resources we are able to ensure that
21 our participants in under-represented communities
22 [inaudible] this resource beyond our in-person
23 audience are able to access it without barriers.
24 NYRR respectfully asks the New York City Council to
25

1
2 consider our request to support our free citywide
3 virtual fitness and social connection program for New
4 York City seniors. Despite the dire need for health-
5 based services for seniors during the COVID-19
6 pandemic, the council's Healthy Aging initiative was
7 cut in FY21, effectively defunding NYRR's work with
8 seniors from the city budget, which was supported
9 under the initiative for many years. With our FY22
10 request we are hoping to restore our funding so our
11 effective Striders program could continue to be
12 offered free virtually and digitally and our in-
13 person pending guidance from city, state, and DFTA,
14 um, officials in the coming budget year. In the wake
15 of the COVID-19 pandemic NYRR believes more than ever
16 in the power of our organization to help New York
17 City seniors and older adult population our
18 [inaudible] closeness and our key partners with the
19 city agencies and our unique ability to produce both
20 in-person and virtual resources that are effective
21 engagement for people of all ages to stay healthy,
22 active, and socially engaged during this difficult
23 time. Thank you again for allowing me to testify.

24 MODERATOR: Thank you, Wesley. Now we
25 will be hearing from Wendell Walters.

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 WENDELL WALTERS: Ah, hi. Ah, thank you
3 for the opportunity to speak with you today. Ah, my
4 name is Wendell Walters. I'm a senior and the senior
5 policy associate in the Center for Justice Across
6 Generations at The Osborne Association. Osborne is a
7 criminal justice organization that provides a wide
8 range of diversion and a re-entry program at sites in
9 the Bronx, ah, Brooklyn, Harlem, Buffalo, ah,
10 Newburgh, ah, as well as services in, ah, 32 New York
11 State prisons and six, ah, New York City jails,
12 including Riker's, of course. My testimony focuses
13 on older adults returning, ah, from incarceration.
14 Today there are more than 8000 people over age 50 in
15 New York State prisons. They represent 25% of our
16 state's prison population and that number will
17 probably be growing in the coming years. At the time
18 of our latest report from the state, ah, there are
19 more than a thousand men and women, ah, age 50 and
20 over who leave state prison and return to New York
21 City each year. Ah, I want to thank the City
22 Council, of course, and the Committee on Aging and
23 the chair and her, ah, leadership, ah, which has been
24 so significant over the past, ah, eight years. I'd
25

1 particularly like to thank, ah, Council Member Daniel
2 Dromm. Ah, I know he's not part of the, ah,
3 committee, ah, but I want to thank him for his
4 leadership in passing the Compassionate Assistance
5 for Returning Elders Act, or we call the CARE Act,
6 ah, which established a temporary interagency, ah,
7 task force that included DFTA, ah, to examine the
8 needs of older adults, ah, post incarceration,
9 although the task force has not been able to meet
10 consistently, ah, over the past year due to the COVID
11 crisis. Headway is now being made to ensure, ah, to,
12 to issue, now being made to, ah, ensure elder re-
13 entry recommendations around housing, health care,
14 and expansion of existing services, ah, in the
15 coming, in the coming months. Osborne is seeking
16 City Council funding in the amount of \$150,000 for
17 Elder Re-entry Initiative, or ERI. ERI provides case
18 management and support for elders returning to New
19 York City from city jails and state prisons. Ah,
20 since fiscal year 2017 ERI has helped more than 400
21 elders with transition planning, referrals to health
22 services, housing, peer mentoring, social isolation
23 support, and a wide range of other support in the
24 community while maintaining a recidivism rate, ah,
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2 for those released from prison of less than 2%. The
3 program works to improve community activity and
4 access to responsive geriatric services for our
5 elders. We also partner with senior centers, ah,
6 hoping they will reopen soon, ah, to increase
7 referrals across trained [inaudible] providers in
8 healthy aging and corrections to ensure city
9 agencies, ah, and providers are better able to
10 address these co-occurring challenges. A more
11 detailed description of the program will be
12 submitted, ah, for the record. Osborne is also
13 developing our own model of re-entry housing for
14 returning elders. We've begun construction on the
15 Fulton Re-entry Center from a former work release
16 building, ah, turned...

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 WENDELL WALTERS: ...[inaudible] in the
19 Bronx that will have 135 transitional beds and
20 programs for the formerly, ah, incarcerated. Ah,
21 construction should be completed next year. We hope
22 that the council will favorably consider our request
23 for funding. Our work in this field has been proven
24 to be successful. More and more individuals of
25 advanced age are coming home to New York City after

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2 being away for many years. They have unique
3 challenges that must be met and Osborne is here to
4 help them. Thank you so much for the chance to talk
5 to you, ah, this afternoon.

6 MODERATOR: Thank you, Wendell. Chair
7 Chin, do you have any remarks?

8 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes, I really wanted
9 to thank this panel. Um, it's always, I'm, I'm very
10 happy to see Cynthia. Um, we've gone a long way, um,
11 in supporting Visiting Neighbors, and I still don't
12 understand why, ah, DFTA does not have a contract
13 with you, ah, to do the service when they're starting
14 all these program about volunteers and visiting when
15 you have the expertise for the past 49 years. Ah,
16 and I'm just, ah, grateful to all the volunteers that
17 you've trained and, ah, taking care our most
18 vulnerable senior, and those stories are really
19 great. And we will continue to support you, ah, in
20 the City Council. And the, um, I forgot your name,
21 but, ah, Bing, yeah, from, ah, University Settlement,
22 that Village View NORC is a City Council, ah, NORC.
23 The City Council supported it, I think, ah, Council
24 Member Rivera, because the Village View is in her
25 district. And that is from City Council

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2 discretionary funding, which is not baselined. And
3 that's why we need to advocate for more baselined
4 funding for NORC, because we should be starting more
5 NORCs, and we started the initiative and hopefully
6 the administration will learn from us and provide
7 more funding to develop more NORC, because that's a
8 direct way of providing services directly, ah, to our
9 seniors. And I want to thank all the, you know,
10 advocates who came to testify today, for your
11 service, for your great work, especially during this
12 pandemic. I mean, Queens Botanical Garden, I wish
13 you were in every borough, but you're only in Queens
14 and Brooklyn. Ah, but I know that the residents in,
15 in Queens, especially in Council Member Koo's
16 district, they enjoy it so much, ah, with meeting
17 their friends and tai chi [inaudible]. Um, so we
18 will continue to support all these important program.
19 And I know about the, ah, the initiative that the,
20 ah, Osborne Association, you were talking about and,
21 ah, strong support from Council Member Dromm, and he
22 is our finance chair, so I'm sure you can count on
23 his support. And I really want to urge everyone, ah,
24 who participated, ah, in this hearing today and
25 really get the message out, ah, to your member, to

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2 your supporter, that the advocacy just started, um,
3 for this year's budget and we need to hear your
4 voices. And the council member needs to hear your
5 voices. Ah, so let's work together to make sure that
6 we have a strong, um, equitable budget that really
7 service the growing population of our seniors, of our
8 older adults, in the, ah, in the city. So, um, I
9 look forward to working with all of you and really
10 appreciate, ah, all your support and, and coming to
11 hearing today.

12 MODERATOR: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And I also wanted to
14 thank, ah, all the committee staff, ah, finance
15 staff, the work of preparing for this hearing, and
16 all the Sergeant at Arms that help us run the, the
17 hearing smoothly. Thank you.

18 MODERATOR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you,
19 Chair. Before we, ah, pass it on, [inaudible] for
20 final closing remarks, um, I just wanted to make sure
21 that we, we got everyone registered to testify. So
22 if we inadvertently missed anyone that would like to
23 testify, please use the Zoom raise hand function and
24 we will call on you in the order in which your hand
25 is raised. Seeing none, we have concluded public

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2 testimony for this hearing. I will now turn it back
3 to Chair Chin for closing remarks.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: [laughs] I think I
5 already did my closing earlier, and so once again
6 thank you to everyone, ah, for joining us today at
7 the, ah, at our budget hearing for the, ah,
8 Department for the Aging, and we look forward to
9 working with all of you to make sure that we have a
10 strong equitable budget for our older adults in New
11 York City. So thank you again and have a wonderful
12 day. [gavel] The hearing is adjourned.

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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 May 22, 2021