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Testimony for NYC Council Hearing on Resolution 1352

Shauneequa Owusu, Manager, Age-Friendly Commerce

November 28, 2012

Good Afternoon Chairman Sanders and members of the Civil Service and Labor Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Shauneequa Owusu and I am representing the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) where I manage the Age-Friendly Commerce portfolio which is comprised of initiatives that address older adults as workers, entrepreneurs, and consumers.

NYAM has been advancing the health of people in cities since 1847. An independent organization, NYAM addresses the health challenges facing the world's urban populations through interdisciplinary approaches to research, education, community engagement, and policy leadership. Our current priorities include creating environments that support healthy aging; strengthening systems that prevent disease and promote the public's health; and working to eliminate health disparities.

Since 2007, NYAM has partnered with the Mayor's Office and the City Council on the Age-friendly NYC initiative, which is dedicated to educating all sectors about the vital roles played by older adults in our city, and encouraging the inclusion of age-awareness into the normal planning and operation of all sectors.

We applaud the fact that the City Council is highlighting the importance of older adults in the workforce. The issue of older workers has been on our agenda for several years. NYAM has investigated the experiences and perspectives of older adults (including people who were working, looking for work, and not looking for work) and employers throughout New York City both before and during the recession. During 2007-2008, NYAM conducted focus groups, individual interviews, and community forums with more than 2,000 older New Yorkers from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds about key issues, including employment. In 2008, NYAM also conducted roundtable discussions with New York City business experts to investigate attitudes, practices, and policies relating to older adults as employees.

Last year NYAM, in partnership with AARP and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, co-sponsored an all-day symposium on employment and the aging workforce, called "Preparing for an Aging Workforce." The symposium included presentations by experts on labor force projections, employer perspectives, and trends in hiring as well as frank discussions between older adults and New York City-based employment experts about key obstacles and potential strategies. Currently, NYAM is conducting interviews with leading NYC businesses about the multigenerational workforce.

Many older adults have consistently reported that they want and/or need to work but face significant barriers to reentering the workforce, remaining competitive within their chosen field or company, and managing work-life transitions related to caretaking responsibilities, functional limitations, and/or retirement. Even in pre-recession 2007, many New Yorkers of 'retirement age' found the prospect of full retirement neither financially viable nor personally desirable. For some, financial concerns were primary and reflected the erosion of worker-friendly policies (e.g., defined benefit plans or retiree health benefits) and savings that were limited or declining in value. Even for those who did not feel financial pressure to work, employment was central to their identity and feelings of self-worth and allowed them to stay socially connected. We spoke with older adults who were delighted to be retired from paid

employment, though many spoke of the desire “to give back” via community or civic engagement or simply by helping friends and neighbors. We also found important variations in the kinds of challenges that older New Yorkers faced. For example, for those employed doing manual labor, especially those paid hourly, functional limitations threaten their ability to maintain their earning levels. For many, the lack of adequate computer skills and/or access to training is a major barrier to remaining competitive on the job or even applying for jobs (many of which are accepted only virtually). Ageism was frequently described as an obstacle to continued or new employment.

The view from business experts was somewhat more complex. In the consultations held prior to the recession, some experts expressed concern about the potential exit of older adults from the workplace and worried about how to replace specific knowledge or skills sets, experience, institutional memory, and excellent work ethic. Others acknowledged struggling with how to: effectively recruit and train older workers; accommodate the changing needs of older employees; restructure benefits to support more flexibility; facilitate better relationships between multiple generations within the workforce; involve older workers in designing creative strategies to address business challenges; and create mechanisms that maximize mentoring and the sharing of knowledge between generations of workers.

However, since the recession, conversations with employers reflect a significant change in attitudes; employers do not now feel compelled to make efforts retain or to hire older workers because of the surplus of highly qualified younger workers. Unfortunately, ageism combined with the lack of research demonstrating older workers’ productivity and the limited visibility of highly effective older workers make it even less likely that older workers will be prioritized in this difficult economy. Reports since 2009 have shown that displaced older workers remain unemployed for far longer periods than younger workers.^{i ii}

It is in the self-interest of companies to maximize the role and productivity of older adults. Through our local business initiative, which is an educational outreach program designed to raise awareness among businesses about the growing size of the older adult consumer market, we have found that many businesses have not yet recognized the value of the older consumer base. Savvy businesses know that customers like to see themselves represented in the businesses they frequent. They want their staff to reflect their customers, which itself becomes a strong reason to have an age-diverse workforce.

We recognize that there is a need to help businesses identify the most effective practices to recruit, train, and utilize older employees. For example, at our symposium last year, employment specialists discussed how many older adults are not conversant with the new ways of job-hunting. The days of mailing in a resume are almost totally gone; much of today's job searches and applications are conducted online. The drug store chain CVS realized that many of their older customers would relate well to older employees, and so they developed special recruitment strategies to attract older adults. But many older adults were not able to navigate their online application system. So they set up a special pre-application training session for potential applicants. It was a win-win approach, providing computer training to older adults and increasing their pool of attractive employee candidates. Their example provides the kind of documented successful practice that other businesses may be able to adapt to suit their own needs.

Therefore, we believe that the most effective strategy to motivate businesses to recruit and retain older workers is to reward businesses that proactively create good environments for workers of all ages—facilitated by older workers. As such, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has funded NYAM to develop and implement the “Sloan Award for Age-friendly Workplaces in NYC” program. We think an evidence-based awards program— demonstrates the value of older workers, identifies best practices and provides documented examples, and offers practical checklists to inform business practices—will help to change

the discourse around older workers from “why should I” to “what is the best way that helps my business?” Our intention is not only to provide an evidence-based compendium of practices for businesses, but also to use the awards program as a means of generating new practices and tracking the success of new initiatives. We need to build knowledge in this area.

Our work will address many aspects relevant to older employees, including recruitment, retention, knowledge transfer, and training. However, the issue of older workers must also be addressed in the context of the increasingly multigenerational workplace. Today it is becoming increasingly common for four and even five generations to work side by side. This change carries some new challenges for organizations to address, as well as new opportunities for creative collaboration. Rather than going by generational stereotypes and possible biases, it is important for businesses to create workplace cultures that support cross-generational collaboration.

NYAM’s administration of the awards program will begin with the development of an evidence-based compendium of current practices and characteristics of age-friendly workplaces which will serve as the basis for application guidelines and evaluations. This phase is currently underway and is being guided by a research advisory panel comprised of leading experts in the field and led by James Parrott of the Fiscal Policy Institute.

The formal announcement of the awards guidelines, along with the public presentation of the characteristics report, will be held in spring 2013. Businesses will also be able to begin submitting applications at this time. An expert advisory panel, consisting of business leaders and experts in workplace management practices, will guide the process and serve as judges for the final awardees; awards will be presented in October 2013. Additionally, NYAM will produce and disseminate tools and products to help businesses make their workplaces more age-friendly.

Thank you for your time today.

ⁱ Johnson, R. W., and Mommaerts, C. (2010) "How did older workers fare in 2009?" The Urban Institute: Washington, DC. March, 2010. Accessed 1.9.11 from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412039_older_workers.pdf

ⁱⁱ Johnson, R. W., and Mommaerts, C. (2011) Age differences in job loss, job search, and re-employment. The Program on Retirement Policy Discussion Paper 11-01; The Urban Institute: Washington, DC. Accessed 1.9.11 from <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412284-Age-Differences.pdf>



**SAGE City Council Testimony – Committee on Civil Service and Labor
November 28, 2012**

Chair Sanders and distinguished members of the Committee: My name is Michele D'Amato, I am the SAGEWorks Program Manager at Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE). SAGE has provided comprehensive social services and community building programs for LGBT older adults in New York City for more than 30 years. Thank you for holding this hearing on Resolution No. 1352, calling upon employers in New York City to hire more workers over 55 years of age.

In New York City, the number of workers in the labor force who are 55 and older has increased steadily from 29.9% in 1993 to 40.4% in 2009. With a slowly recovering economy, the recently released Census figures for 2011 show that poverty rates for older adults in New York City has also increased from 17.2% to 19% over the year before. Given these facts and the increasing numbers in the older adult population, it's clear that the number of older adults looking to remain in or re-enter the workforce will continue to rise. With this surge in older workers, we must look closely at the barriers that older people face when seeking employment. Challenges such as age discrimination (which studies show begins as early as age 40), lack of training in new technology and industries and a disconnection from employment networks can extend the job search process and deepen the economic insecurity of unemployed older adults.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults are part of a cohort of older job-seekers who may be overlooked by employers and for whom job training and employment opportunities are absolutely critical. Like many elder job-seekers, LGBT older adults seek employment to support themselves as they age, yet LGBT older adults' face particular financial and social challenges that can compound their need for employment. LGBT older people are twice as likely to live alone and half as likely to be partnered than their heterosexual counterparts, meaning that many LGBT older adults are at risk for social isolation. Further, LGBT older people are more likely to experience economic insecurity or poverty as they age, due to past experiences of workplace discrimination and unequal access to federal safety net programs.

Based on limited demographic data, we estimate that there are between 12,000 and 24,000 LGBT elders living in poverty in New York City alone.¹ Indeed 35% of NYC SAGE constituents live on \$10,000 a year or less and an additional 35% live on \$20,000 or less. Clearly, many LGBT older adults need stronger financial supports and would benefit from employment income. They also stand to benefit greatly from the intangible advantages of participation in the workforce such as increased social connectedness and mental engagement.

¹ These figures are based on a variety of different studies that have estimated the percentage of gay, lesbian and bisexual people to be between 4 and 8 percent. Few studies have measured the percentage of transgender people. However, measuring the number of LGBT people is difficult, given the undercounting caused by factors such as stigma, underreporting and a range of methodological barriers, such as inconsistent question formats. See Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, *Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community*. (Los Angeles: Williams Institute, 2009).

Given the need for workforce supports for LGBT older adults, SAGE launched the SAGEWorks program in 2010. SAGEWorks is a workforce development program for LGBT people aged 40 and older that seeks to improve the economic security and overall wellness of LGBT older people through employment training, skills development and access to employment resources and networks. The SAGEWorks program begins with a work skills assessment and offers participants tailored trainings on computers and technology, resume writing and interview preparation. SAGEWorks also provides opportunities for employment referrals through our comprehensive network of community and business partners. Through this network we seek to place SAGEWorks participants at jobs where they can earn a living and be in an environment where they don't feel like they must go back "into the closet" to be comfortable in the workplace.

We launched SAGEWorks in New York City in 2010 and the program has celebrated a number of achievements over the past two years. We are an AARP certified WorkSearch site and have partnered with OATS, ReServe and a number of other community partners to continually expand the training and resources available to older LGBT job-seekers. As the Manager of this program, I have seen how job security has an incredibly stabilizing effect on the lives of our participants who find employment. Employment offers not only economic security, but their new roles in the workplace help SAGEWorks participants feel more confident, more empowered and positively affects their physical and mental well-being. I know firsthand that employment supports the lives of older adults in countless ways.

As SAGEWorks evolves, we see opportunities for growth and collaboration ahead. Though our program alone cannot solve the problems of workplace discrimination related to age, sexual orientation or gender identity, there are clear benefits in sustaining a dialogue with employers about how these types of bias negatively impact employees and businesses overall. We welcome the opportunity to work with the City Council to strengthen education and employment programs targeted toward LGBT and other marginalized older workers.

We also urge employers citywide to recognize the skills and strengths that all older workers can contribute. The older adult population represents an enormously talented and experienced pool of workers and we are hopeful that their skills and their participation in programs such as SAGEWorks will provide them with numerous opportunities in the years ahead.

We thank you for your time and attention to these important concerns.

Michele D'Amato
Program Manager, SAGEWorks
SAGE
305 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001



AARP New York State Office

**Testimony before the
New York City Council**

Testimony on Resolution 1352

Regarding Employment of Older Workers

November 28, 2012

New York City, NY

My name is Beth Finkel, Senior Manager of State Programs and Services for AARP New York.

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a membership that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. Currently there are 800,000 AARP members in NYC and 2.5 million in New York State.

On behalf of AARP's members in New York City, we appreciate the opportunity to offer comments on Resolution Number 1352, a Resolution calling upon employers in New York City to hire more workers over 55 years of age.

I know some people may wonder why AARP – the “retirement” organization – cares about older workers. The fact is – about one third of our members are still in the work force.

Your resolution hits on two key dynamics at play right now in New York City and across the country. The first is the economy. And the second is demographics.

As to the economy – this Great Recession has been a punch in the gut for workers of all ages. But it has been particularly grim for older workers, many of whom fear that job loss or the damage done to their savings means retirement is a dream they'll never see come true.

According to the most recent figures from the federal government, about 1.9 million people aged 55 and over were unemployed in October; that's 17,000 fewer than in September, which is somewhat comforting. However, while the unemployment rate for the workforce aged 55 and over remains lower than rates for the total labor force, once unemployed, older workers are, on average, out of work longer than their younger counterparts. In October, the average duration of unemployment for older jobseekers rose to 57.7 weeks – that's more than a year out of work - as compared to 37.8 weeks for younger workers.

I want to stress – we fully appreciate that unemployment is a difficult situation for workers of all ages. But for older workers, it comes at a point in their lives when the damage done to their nest eggs is particularly painful. They just don't have as many years ahead of them as do younger workers to rebuild that 401K or other savings vehicle.

But is hiring or retaining an older worker simply a “nice” thing to do? No. It is also a smart business decision and it's smart for the economy.

Why?

There's evidence that society as a whole is better off if more people work past retirement age. For starters, delaying retirement could ease pressure on Social Security, Medicare and other social programs. For many older persons, remaining in the workforce helps people stay engaged, and that helps them stay healthy. And, if you've got a paycheck, you're a consumer of goods and services, and that's good for the economy as well.

Plus, employers themselves can cut their overall costs by retaining experienced workers. A 2005 study by Towers Perrin – commissioned by AARP – concluded that employers could save as much as 3% in average per-employee compensation costs by doubling the retention rate of mature employees.

Other business benefits are more esoteric, but no less real. Older workers are reliable, productive and knowledgeable. And there are some new ideas that can only come from a lifetime of observation and learning.

Overlaying all of this is the demographics:

By 2020, 35% of the total US workforce will be age 50+.... That's up by 32% in 2012.

And what segment of the workforce is increasing the fastest?

The highest growth rate is in the 65-74 age group... a whopping 83.4% percent increase is projected between 2010 & 2020.... The second highest growth rate is the 75+ group.

In absolute numbers, these two older groups will still be relatively small compared to the younger groups. Nevertheless, these two older groups will include approximately 12 million workers ages 65+ by 2020.

As for the rest of the age groups, there is actually a decline in the 20-24 segment, and the 45-54 segment. There are slight increases between those two. Then an almost 26-percent increase in the 55-64 group.

These numbers send a very clear message that if employers want to meet their workforce needs in the coming years, they are going to have to turn to older workers to do so.

That's why AARP has launched Work Reimagined. It's the first talent exchange dedicated to helping companies find experienced workers... and to helping experienced professionals connect to more satisfying careers. You can find it at WorkReimagined.org, a social media platform powered by LinkedIn.

A key component of Work Reimagined is the existing relationships AARP has with hundreds of reputable employers – including past winners of our Best Employers for Workers Over 50 award and providers of AARP member benefits. More than 150 organizations from a variety of industries have signed on and are excited about Work Reimagined. Our list of partners includes AT&T, Google, The Hartford, MetLife, UnitedHealth Group, Harvard University, Toys R Us, Lowes and countless other local and national companies, including 11 from New York State. Their logos are featured prominently on the Work Reimagined site and many have jobs posted on Linked In.

All of these companies have signed the Work Reimagined Pledge, expressing publicly their recognition of the value of older workers.

The pledge simply says, "We believe in equal opportunity for all workers, regardless of age, and that 50+ workers should have a level playing field in their ability to compete for and obtain jobs. Recognizing the value of experienced workers, we pledge to recruit across diverse age groups and to consider all applicants on an equal basis as we hire for positions within our organization."

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the City of New York, as an employer, and other businesses in New York City, to take the AARP Work Reimagined Pledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, AARP supports Resolution 1352, a Resolution calling upon employers in New York City to hire more workers over 55 years of age. We hope you will give this Resolution all due consideration and report this matter out favorably so that it can stand before the full Council for a vote. Changes in our economy and a demographic shift necessitate the need for employers to

consider policies that take into account the benefits of employing older workers. The passage of Resolution 1352 will help reinforce the importance of older workers to employers in New York City. Thank You.



**Testimony of Michelle Holder, Senior Labor Market Analyst
Hearing before the Committee on Civil Service and Labor**

In Relation to Resolution Number 1352

Resolution Calling Upon Employers in NYC to Hire More Workers over 55 Years of Age

November 28, 2012

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Community Service Society (CSS), where I serve as the senior labor market analyst. CSS is an 168 year-old organization that works to advance upward mobility for low-income New Yorkers, through research, advocacy for systemic change, litigation and launching model programs. We wanted to provide testimony at this important hearing because in our recently published report “Women, Blacks, and Older Workers Struggle in Post-Recession New York City” we highlighted the fact that older New Yorkers are facing an especially tough time if they become unemployed.

In the report we outlined the scope of long-term unemployment in city from 2009 to 2011, and found that women ages 55 to 64 who lost their jobs remained out of work longer than any other demographic group. Specifically, older women were jobless an average of 49 weeks, almost a year. Older women tend to hold middle-income jobs, and the problem has been that recent job creation and efforts to attract jobs to New York City has been concentrated in either the low-wage service sector or high-skilled fields like high tech while mid-skill level jobs continue to shrink.

In addition, men ages 55 to 64 years saw a drop of nearly 5 percentage points in their labor force participation rate, from 69.2 percent in 2009 to 64.3 percent in 2011. The labor force participation rate tells us the degree of a group’s attachment to the labor force. It measures those who either have a job, or are actively looking for one, as a percent of the working-age population. Some of these older men who lost jobs during the recent deep recession may never be able to regain jobs and will have left the labor force permanently.

Even if unemployed persons over 55 years of age are able to obtain employment sometimes they find themselves in the position of having to accept part-time work. However, too often part-time jobs don’t provide needed benefits like health insurance or paid sick time off—benefits that older workers in particular really need.

CSS hopes that the Council will use all tools and options available to it to ensure that older workers are not left permanently behind in post-recession New York City.

**Testimony of William Larmer – Employed in NYC’s Fashion Industry for 40 years, SAGEWorks Participant
Hearing on Resolution No. 1352, calling upon employers in NYC to hire more workers over 55 years of age
Committee on Civil Service and Labor – November 28, 2012**

Distinguished members of the committee, my name is William Larmer and it is a pleasure for me to address the Council on an issue that is of great importance not only to me personally, but for my generation THE BABY BLOOMERS – I use the word “blooming” because I feel I’m just beginning to bloom at the young age of 64. My forty plus years of working in the highly competitive fashion industry gave me a lifetime of valuable experiences as well as my share of challenges.

When Michelle D’Amato first approached me with the opportunity to be present for this hearing I immediately said YES. It was after hanging up the phone that I wondered - why *did* I jump at this opportunity with so much enthusiasm? I realize that it was because this hearing has given today a real purpose, and having a purpose at any age is of vital importance. Employment offers people purpose and an ability not only to earn money, but to feel challenged by work and to contribute to society. What I enjoyed most about my last job was working with the young designers and sharing my knowledge with them. True, working with designers younger than myself presented challenges - any job does - but I could still rely on the technical skills I learned throughout my career.

Years ago, at some point in my career, I noticed that the design positions that were open to me in my 20s and 30s now seemed closed to me. These jobs were going to a younger generation and I began to see how age discrimination can play out in various ways throughout a career. (I felt fortunate to work in a career where being a gay man was seen as an asset, and I never experienced this type of job discrimination that many of my LGBT friends working in other fields experienced). At age 40, to help my career, I went back to school and got a degree as an Associate of Applied Science in Fashion Design at FIT. I had the wonderful opportunity to study in Florence, Italy in product design and Renaissance Art. Then eleven years ago, I learned how to use a computer and just three years ago I was at FIT taking two computer courses to make me more competitive to the demands of my industry. I met many other older men and women who were doing the same thing. Even with all these skills and all of my experience, I found that in my 50s I had to reinvent myself in my field to book more jobs. I moved out of fashion design and into production. In doing so, I took a drastic cut in salary and basically started from a new beginning in production. As years went on I went to job interviews and began to hear potential employers tell me “You are overqualified.” Somehow employers began to interpret my skills and years of experience not as an asset, but as a liability. After more than twenty interviews it was hard for me not to come to the conclusion that age played a part in the hiring decisions. That was a very sad revelation.

What I feel we all love about New York City is its energy, though at one time I questioned whether New York would be the place for me as I got older. Certainly, my experiences working in one of New York’s most valued industries was irreplaceable – but I question whether there are enough supports in place for aging workers like myself. That is why I’m here today – to help support any efforts where older New Yorkers can be on a level playing field with our younger counterparts. I’m now happier than I have been at any other time, because I’m doing all of the things that I love - pottery and writing classes and taking advantage of all the wonderful benefits that New York City offers. But the reality is that I continue to need an income to provide for myself.

This past year has brought new challenges and a life transition as I have been going through the process of retirement. SAGE and SAGEWorks have been of the utmost support to me. SAGE has always provided a safe and supportive environment and it was only by participating in so many of their programs that I realized I was not alone in my challenge to find ways to support myself. So many of my contemporaries have the same financial needs and the same desires to contribute as I do. Drive and ambition do not go away with age. All we are asking for is an opportunity to continue to be able to be independent, to take care of ourselves financially, maintain our dignity and to be able to use our skills, learned over a lifetime, to contribute. My skills and work ethic have only gotten stronger as I’ve gotten older and any potential employer could benefit. One thing I’ve learned, and I’m sure you will agree, is that my generation, we don’t give up and we are stronger than ever.

Thank you for this opportunity.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 1352
 in favor in opposition.

Date: 11/28/2012

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christine Daska

Address: _____

I represent: AARP

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MICHELLE HOLDER

Address: 105 E. 22ND ST 8TH FLOOR NYC

I represent: COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY

Address: SAME AS ABOVE

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Name: WILLIAM LAEMER

Address: 305 7TH AVE NYC 10001

I represent: JACE

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Name: Michele D'Amato

Address: 305 7th Ave, NYC 10001

I represent: SAGE

Address: Same as Above

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/28/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHAUNEEQUA OWUCHI

Address: 1216 Fifth Ave, NY NY

I represent: NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

Address: _____

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