



**Department for
the Aging**

TESTIMONY

Presented by

Jocelyn Groden

Associate Commissioner for the Bureau of Social Services & Active Aging

on

Oversight: Older Adult Workforce Programs

before the

**New York City Council
Committee on Aging**

on

**Tuesday, December 12, 2023
10:00 am**

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on Aging. I am Jocelyn Groden, Associate Commissioner for the Bureau of Social Services and Active Aging at the New York City Department for the Aging (NYC Aging). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding this incredibly important topic showcasing the work that the New York City Department for the Aging (NYC Aging) has done around older adult workforce development. For five decades, NYC Aging has supported older New Yorkers through Older Adult Workforce Programs which help unemployed or underemployed adults over 55 find work opportunities that utilize their skills and knowledge. Our current workforce programs include the Older Adult Employment Program, Silver Corps, Silver Stars, Civic Engagement Employment Service (ReServe), and the volunteer-based Foster Grandparent Program.

Connecting older New Yorkers to meaningful employment opportunities is critical. As the city's population of adults over 60 continue to grow, and as life-expectancy rebounds post-pandemic, the need for employment later in life will also grow. So, whether an older adult *has* to remain in the workforce or *wants* to remain the workforce, NYC Aging remains focused on growing older adult employment opportunities and finding ways to continue investing in our existing programs and services.

Older Adult Employment Programs

The older adult employment programs offered by NYC Aging are intended to help supplement the financial needs of older adults through meaningful work. In addition to the monetary benefits brought by employment, these programs combat social isolation in older adults, build their skills both in workplace situations and with technology, provide an avenue for connection to other social services, and showcase the importance of a multigenerational workplace. NYC Aging currently operates four main older adult employment programs and a volunteer program which pays older adults a small stipend for their service and time. Two of our programs are funded through federal grants, and our other programs connect older adults to employment opportunities at NYC agencies or local non-profit organizations to fill open positions.

- **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP):** The SCSEP program is for New Yorkers age 55 and over who are currently unemployed and have a family income under 125% of the federal poverty who are looking to learn new employable skills and are committed to actively seeking employment. NYC Aging received federal grant funding to this program and is oversubscribed with interest in some boroughs.
- **Silver Corps:** Funded by *AmeriCorps Seniors*, the Silver Corps pilot program is our newest employment program serving older New Yorkers. Silver Corps serves older New Yorkers aged 55 and older. Participants who are at or below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible to receive a stipend and travel allowance. The program offerings include credentialing, job readiness training, support in securing employment, and much more. Ageism in the workplace is pernicious throughout our society, and this program came about following the obvious impacts of job loss during the pandemic. Displacement of older workers has been persistent but programs like Silver Corps work to push against that problem.
- **Civic Engagement Employment Services (ReServe):** In addition to SCSEP and Silver Corps, NYC Aging contracts with ReServe, Inc. to match retirees aged 50 and older who seek part-time work with NYC agencies. Retirees come from an array of professional backgrounds, including social work, law, marketing, human resources, health care, education, retail, finance, and trade.
- **Silver Stars:** NYC Aging also manages the Silver Stars program, which works with NYC agencies to place City government retirees in part-time, temporary work assignments. City government retirees help agencies meet business needs and support organizational growth by sharing their knowledge and experience with newer workers without the demands of traditional, full-time employment.
- **Foster Grandparent Programs:** NYC Aging administers a volunteer-based opportunity for New Yorkers 55 and older and at or below the 200% poverty level to provide one-on-one support to children with special

needs with the goal of improving their academic, social, and emotional development through volunteer assignments and school-based settings. These older adults work with children from ages 3 to 12 to support their social, emotional, and academic skills.

Collaborations with Other NYC Agencies

In addition to our direct work to support the employment needs of older adults, NYC Aging also partners with other agencies through larger initiatives like the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, and other initiatives like those seen in Executive Order 22, to further support the needs of older adults. In September 2022, NYC Aging was appointed chair of the NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, a first-of-its-kind, multi-agency collaborative convened by Mayor Adams to support services, projects, and policies benefitting older adults across New York City. Through the Cabinet, the 23 member agencies facilitate coordination and efficiency across departments, leverage resources, and shape current and future services to better serve the broad and varied needs of older adults as they age-in-place. Cabinet members cover multiple facets of City services and resources, including public safety, housing, transportation, health, and social services. Collectively, these city agencies will work together to eliminate silos and create joint action and innovation to ensure that New York is a city for all ages. As part of the Cabinet, City agencies will collaborate in eliminating age-related barriers and inequities in services and develop cross-agency solutions to address challenges facing older New Yorkers. The Cabinet will also review current and future City initiatives and projects to ensure they are age-inclusive and accessible to adults over 60 years old.

Additionally, in August of 2022, Mayor Adams signed Executive Order 22, which established a new vision for workforce development in the City of New York and formally established the newly named Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development. Executive Order 22 stipulated the creation of a Mayoral Taskforce comprised of individuals outside City government – including representatives from businesses, labor unions, nonprofits, funders, and other types of organizations – charged with recommending Citywide goals, devising a framework for evaluating public investments, and making recommendations for improving employment outcomes for all New Yorkers, including older workers. Through Executive Order 22, Mayor Adams also established the Interagency Talent and Workforce Development Cabinet, known simply as the “Talent Cabinet.” This body, comprised of representatives from 40+ City agencies that have a stake in talent and workforce development efforts, has been meeting monthly since November 2022 and is coordinated by NYC Talent.

Other Partnerships

Finally, as alluded to earlier, NYC Aging established a new partnership with AmeriCorps Seniors—a Federally funded partner—to launch Silver Corps. NYC Aging was selected as one of two Workforce Development Senior Demonstration Program grantees in the country. This pilot serves as the precursor to a national federal funding opportunity for the AmeriCorps Seniors Workforce Development Senior Demonstration Program to support older workers. NYC Aging has also worked to cultivate public-private partnerships to serve older workers and establish training and career pathways. We work with a number of local and regional employer partners to understand and fill their hiring needs. NYC Aging ultimately helps to facilitate linkages between older workers seeking employment to employers seeking talent.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are many opportunities provided through programs run by NYC Aging which serve the workforce needs of older adults. We remain committed to further cultivating the necessary supports that older adults need. While these programs have seen successful outcomes in training older adults and placing them in long-term permanent employment, we are still combatting the effects of the pandemic and the continual presence of ageism in the workforce. Thank you again for this opportunity to discuss this with you today. I am able to address any questions you may have about our workforce programs.



TESTIMONY OF VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE
New York City Council Oversight- Older Adult Workforce Programs
December 12, 2023

Good morning. My name is Andrea Tan, the Microenterprise Project Director at Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS). We are a legal services nonprofit founded in 1984. Our mission is to bridge the justice gap in underserved communities through increased pro bono legal services. The VOLS Microenterprise Project, spanning two decades, supports small business owners with free legal services, aiding in forming businesses, drafting contracts, and handling other transactional legal needs. We collaborate with community organizations, prioritizing minority, women, immigrant, and veteran-owned businesses. Our goal is to empower entrepreneurs for financial stability and independence.

VOLS is dedicated to addressing the legal needs of older adults through targeted initiatives. The Microenterprise Project assists encore entrepreneurs in formalizing their businesses, ensuring compliance, and protecting personal and business assets to mitigate legal risks. Concurrently, the Senior Law Project aids New Yorkers aged 60 and over in creating essential life planning documents. Together, these projects deliver comprehensive advocacy for our older adult clients.

This year, a significant portion of our clients—over one third—were aged 50 and above, seeking legal assistance for their new or established businesses. Allow me to share inspiring stories of some encore entrepreneurs we've supported in the past year. We guided a 54-year-old Bronx entrepreneur in safeguarding her sweet tea trade secrets and registering a trademark. For two cousins in their 60s embarking on a traditional Caribbean food catering business, we're currently drafting a partnership agreement. In Harlem, we assisted a 64-year-old entrepreneur in



launching a pottery making business. Remarkably, we're advising a 90-year-old inventor on patent-related inquiries for one of his inventions. These diverse examples underscore the breadth and impact of our support for entrepreneurs of all ages.

In our engagement with encore entrepreneurs, we've recognized two distinct client profiles: those opting to postpone retirement or re-enter the workforce post-retirement, driven either by financial necessity or a desire to stay professionally active. Many discover that starting their own business is the most viable path, considering the challenges older adults often face in securing traditional employment. Their wealth of life skills and experience uniquely positions them as exceptional entrepreneurs. Despite this, accessing technical and legal assistance can be challenging and expensive for older adults. At VOLS, we bridge this gap by not only providing top-notch, free legal services facilitated by our network of law firm volunteers but also by adopting a client-centric approach. We prioritize individual needs, including language access and overall accessibility, ensuring our support is tailored to each entrepreneur's unique journey.

Drawing on our experience, VOLS believes that the proposed bills in the resolution will be beneficial for our clients. The introduction of a focused program providing education and training customized for individuals aged 50 and above, managing transitions from current employment, retirement, or other life statuses to becoming encore entrepreneurs, is expected to enhance opportunities for our clients. By encouraging individuals to explore entrepreneurship, these initiatives not only promote economic self-sufficiency but also contribute to stimulating the local economy.

Thank you for accepting our testimony and supporting New York City's encore entrepreneurs.



**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIAN GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA
OF THE BROOKDALE CENTER FOR HEALTHY AGING, HUNTER COLLEGE
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON AGING**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING
"OLDER ADULT WORKFORCE PROGRAMS"**

DECEMBER 12, 2023

My name is christian gonzález-rivera and I'm the director of strategic policy initiatives at the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, a research and policy center based at Hunter College.

Thank you, Chair Hudson for calling this hearing. We would like to respond to the intent of each of the resolutions you introduced.

We support Resolution 758, which calls on the Empire State Development Corporation to expand resources for encore entrepreneurship. As you acknowledge in the Resolution, older people face challenges when considering entrepreneurship and yet a growing number of older New Yorkers choose to start their own businesses. The Empire State Development Corporation is the right entity to be tapping into this opportunity to build jobs by supporting older entrepreneurs because it has the resources to do it. The EDC manages the funds of the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDC), allocating over \$100 million annually statewide for economic development programs. Redirecting more of these funds toward promoting entrepreneurship among older New Yorkers would make a big difference in ensuring that our state's workforce development system works for older New Yorkers.

Regarding Resolution 760, we believe that while your intention is in the right place, the approach is not the right one. Workforce development services, whether targeting older or younger workers, are best handled by agencies already equipped to manage such programs. In the context of New York State, the existing Workforce Development division of the Empire State Development Corporation is better suited for this responsibility. NYSOFA's expertise lies in services provided by older adult centers, and it should maintain its focus in that domain.

Confining services for older workers to a government agency not primarily dedicated to workforce development undermines their interests. Older workers should have comprehensive access to the entire spectrum of our workforce development system. In New York City alone, the workforce development system receives approximately \$600 million in funding, three times greater than NYSOFA's entire budget.

Ageism is the predominant challenge faced by older individuals in the workforce. Workforce development service providers can play a pivotal role in combatting ageism by advocating for their older clients, mirroring their efforts on behalf of other demographic groups. The workforce development system in New York City, with

proper incentives, can effectively champion the cause of older workers, as it already does for immigrants, individuals with lower formal education, and less experienced younger workers.

As you are aware, New York City is mandated to establish an Office of Older Worker Development within the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development, as per Bill 1694 enacted in 2020 and introduced by former Aging Chair Margaret Chin. Brookdale was part of a team of experts and advocates that helped Councilmember Chin to develop that bill as a package of other bills addressing the needs of older workers.

Modeled on the successful Center for Youth Employment (CYE), this office, led by an experienced professional grounded in workforce development services, has the potential to transform and expand the reach of workforce development services at the state level.

We would be glad to partner with the council to make New York City a model for the state and the nation in terms of its workforce development services for older New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

December 11, 2023

Justin Brannan
Chairman
Committee on Finance
The Council of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Plan to Eliminate the Budget Gap FY2024

Dear Chairman Brannan:

I write with extreme concern regarding the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) plan to eliminate the budget gap for FY2024 released last month. While we can appreciate a fiscally prudent approach to budgeting, disproportionate cuts to the budget based on insufficient or outdated information on governmental expenditures and receipts can set the stage for changes to government programs with disastrous consequences. And this assessment does not take into account the initial budgetary allocations that fall short of the funding that is needed to address standing needs of communities that remain underserved. We are particularly concerned about the PEG's effects on Hispanics in New York City.

OMB anticipates a budget shortfall in excess of \$7 billion dollars for FY25. However, the Independent Budget Office indicates that anticipated shortfall does not take into account a surplus of \$3.6 billion being realized in FY24 as a result of added tax receipts, so that applying that surplus to pre-pay for FY25 expenditures would reduce any anticipated budgetary shortfall to \$1.8 billion. As smaller anticipated shortfall applies less pressure to make drastic budgetary decisions than an anticipated \$7 billion shortfall.

Moreover, we are concerned that a large proportion of the savings sought by OMB stem from savings in personnel service, suggesting that positions are not being filled, as well as freezing the hiring of personnel that has been deemed necessary to carry out the programmatic obligations the City of New York has assumed towards its residents. Specifically, we are concerned about the effects of not having the necessary personnel to carry out the business of the city in areas such as education, healthcare and public safety. The proposed cuts to the Department of Education budget that come from PS accruals as well as a hiring freeze means the City of New York will not have the personnel it sorely needs to educate the children, youth and young adults of the city.

Hispanics, including Puerto Ricans, are overrepresented among children and youth. One-fifth of all city residents are under 18 years of age, but a quarter of Hispanics are children and 23% of Puerto Rican are children. They are therefore overrepresented in the New York City public school system. About 44% of Puerto Rican and 42% of Hispanic attend elementary school (compared to 39% for the population as a whole); while 21% of Hispanics, as well as Puerto

Ricans, attend high school (compared to 19% of the population as a whole). Cuts to the Department of Education, by specifically not bringing educators staffing levels to what is needed, will affect these 422,000 children disproportionately.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the impact these drastic cuts can have on the city's municipal labor force on its own. As a recent report we have released recently indicates, Hispanics are underrepresented in the municipal government's labor force by 5.5% (or about 8,400 persons). Not filling vacancies with qualified personnel that includes Hispanics forecloses the goal of achieving Hispanic parity in municipal employment, which should be a minimum standard and goal.

We therefore urge you to review and challenge these proposed budget measures included in OMB's plan to eliminate the budget gap. We ask that you assess the negative impact these measures will have while keeping in mind there are in fact ample financial resources in the City's purse to meet the obligations; obligations that were sensibly established with the City Council's input, while being responsible stewards of the City's finances.

Sincerely,

Carlos Vargas-Ramos, PhD
Director of Public Policy
Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO)
Hunter College (CUNY)
695 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10065

Good Morning/Afternoon Councilmembers

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jeremy Kaplan, and I serve as Executive Director at Encore Community Services, one of the city's largest nonprofits whose only focus is on improving the lives of older adults by offering them access to healthy food choices and services to age and thrive in community for as long as possible.

Encore wholeheartedly supports investments in workforce for older adults, and with a 15% budget cut to NYC Aging those programs are extremely important because many more older adults will need to work just to scrape by, despite having worked their whole lives and now wanting to enjoy their retirement.

Aging services - are facing a multi-faceted financial crisis. Reimbursement rates for meals - fall far behind as inflation dramatically increases our core operating costs. We continue to face staffing challenges as pay for human service workers remains impossibly low. Against all odds and despite being among the lowest paid of any sector in the city, Human Service Employees continue to deliver nutrition and vital socialization services for older adults. Yet the city continues to turn a blind eye to the cry of tens of thousands of essential workers who have begged the city to #JustPay pay them an equitable cost of living adjustment.

Our city has made commitments older neighbors, **particularly through the NYC Aging Community Care plan. Now, despite the fact that increasing access to food and community care for older adults was a fundamental campaign promise made by the majority of our elected officials; with these indiscriminate budget cuts, the government of the City of New York seems to be considering denying older adults' access to these services.**

To be clear, we understand that sometimes budget cuts are unavoidable. But **equal cuts are not equitable cuts.** To propose a sweeping 15% cut, indiscriminately and universally, is not savvy financial management but fiscal irresponsibility.

Older adults, especially those who face isolation and high nutritional risk, need **more community care** support - not less. **Community Care is the fundamental service provided by Older Adult Centers which is at most immediate risk with this sweeping budget cut.** The population of older adults in our city is the fastest-growing demographic. Just this year, the surgeon general declared loneliness an epidemic - shining a light on the needs of socially isolated older adults. This is a population in

desperate need of support and connection and for whom a reduction in services would cause significant harm.

The additional 5% planned cut in January would be detrimental to the continued running of our **Older Adult center community care** programs. The city has an obligation to carefully evaluate the budget and surgically implement reductions. Anything less will result in disaster for human service providers, and more importantly, harm to the older adults we give back to.

Human Service Organizations like Encore Community Services touch every aspect of daily life - from public education, health and nutrition, and cultural enrichment to language access. We call on the City to partner with the nonprofit sector and work toward creative solutions - not hinder the people of the city of New York further.

The Human Services Sector cannot withstand a 15% cut to its budget. Any additional cuts will only undermine the public safety, health, and cleanliness of New York City.

I urge this committee to refuse the indiscriminate cuts proposed by the administration and to advance a budget that balances fiscal responsibility with care and compassion to the older adults that rely on us for nutrition, enrichment, and support as we age.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/12/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jocelyn Gordon, Assistant Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Aging

Address: 2 Lafayette St, 7th Floor

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/12/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy Kaplan

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: Encore Community Services

Address: 239 West 49th St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0758-

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/12/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Tan

Address: 40 Worth St suite 829, NY, NY

I represent: Volunteers of Legal Service

Address: 40 Worth St suite 829, NY, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms