



## **TESTIMONY**

Presented by

**Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez  
Commissioner**

on

**FY 2024 Preliminary Budget**

before the

**New York City Council  
Committee on Aging**

on

**Tuesday, March 14, 2023  
At 10:00 a.m.**

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Chair Brannan, and members of the Aging and Finance Committees. I am Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, Commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging (NYC Aging). I am joined this morning by Jose Mercado our Chief Financial Officer. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss NYC Aging's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

In addition to working to eliminate ageism and ensuring the dignity and quality of life of older New Yorkers, providing high quality services and resources are among our top priorities here at NYC Aging. To support this important work, our FY 24 Preliminary Budget projects \$466.7 million in funding, of which \$313 million is in City funds; which includes allocations of \$231 million to support older adult centers, \$60.1 million for home delivered meals (HDM), \$43.6 million for case management (CMA), \$35 million to support home care for homebound seniors who are not Medicaid eligible, \$15 million for NORC programs, and \$8.1 million for caregiver services.

Through the support and advocacy of important stakeholders we have also advanced many of our efforts to help older New Yorkers as we learn to live with COVID-19 and return to a sense of normal life post-pandemic. The last year has challenged us to do more with our existing resources, but I continue to be proud of the work that NYC Aging has done, including in partnership with our network of providers dedicated to serving older New Yorkers.

Some notable recent successes include:

- This past year we saw the launch of the *NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers*. We are fortunate that the Mayor is committed to an age-inclusive city and supports the continued development of interagency collaborations which promote government efficiency and further help to serve the needs of older New Yorkers. We are proud of the work and projects that 20 city agencies are completing through the three main subcommittees of the Cabinet—Health, Intergenerational, and Housing.
- In fall 2022, NYC Aging launched the “Join Us” campaign, a multi-media public service announcement encouraging older adults to return to their local Older Adult Center (OAC) following the isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are happy to share that there were 37,992 individual visits to the NYC Aging webpage during the campaign compared to 1,939 website visits in the same time period in 2021. This represents a 1,859% increase in website traffic at NYC Aging. While some older adults are still hesitant to return to congregate settings for meals or programming at Older Adult Centers (OACs) we are seeing steady increases for in-person participation. We are hopeful this will continue to grow and match pre-pandemic levels. As always, meal service is a core focus of the work done here at NYC Aging and with our provider network in the OACs.
- Finally, in June 2022 we launched Silver Stars, a work program for retired city municipal employees who can return to work at city agencies and support business needs while still receiving income from their city pensions. We have seen nearly 100 positions developed and placed across 16 agencies or elected official offices. I want to thank participating agencies, including the Office of the NYC Comptroller for their commitment to employing Silver Star participants. And I want to take this opportunity to encourage other agencies or offices to also consider this critically important program.

We're also incredibly grateful for the ongoing support of the City Council, which in FY 23 awarded NYC Aging with over \$43.2 million in discretionary funding, allowing us to make even greater investments in often unserved or underserved communities. Furthermore, we baselined \$5.1M of

these investments and I urge you to continue allocate these funds for aging services, such as art programing, so that we can continue to diversify and enhance educational, art and recreational programing for older adults.

### **Home Delivered Meals**

Our Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program is another vital component in NYC Aging's network of services. Not only do HDMs provide sustenance to homebound older adults across the five boroughs, the interaction with the delivery person—which for many of our clients may be the only direct human interaction for the day—support our ongoing effort to combat social isolation. This program continues to follow the strict guidance set by the state and is open to those who meet those criteria.

NYC Aging funded programs address the most critical overarching goals of addressing food insecurity among older adults. This includes improving meal options for recipients, embracing the diversity of our city by increasing the availability of culturally aligned meals, and promoting uniformly high-quality and nutritious meals. In FY 22, 4,287,681 meals were delivered by our providers. As of November 2022, the 14 providers in the HDM program served 26,670 clients.

We are thrilled to have announced the increase in reimbursement rates for home delivered meals. This funding brought the reimbursement rate for meals to \$10.68, retroactive to January 1, 2022, and raised the rates to \$11.78 at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2023. This investment, totaling \$2.3 million in FY22, and \$9.4 million in FY23. Additionally, we are working with our providers to complete the purchase of Hot Shot Vans which the Council funded last year at just over \$3 million. To date, 10 of those vans have been delivered and we are working with the vendor and our programs to complete the remainder of those purchase and delivery of vehicles.

### **OACs & NORCs**

In 2021, we completed the Older Adult Centers (OAC) and Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) RFP which has added 31 new sites to our network which far exceeds the commitment of 25 new sites mentioned in the Community Care Plan. Currently, our OAC network includes 311 centers and our NORC network has 36 NYC Aging funded sites and an additional 17 sites which are funded through Council discretionary dollars. Recently, NYC Aging participated in the ribbon cutting of a long-awaited center run by ELMCOR in LeFrak City, the Phoenix 3 OAC, and we broke ground in Brooklyn for an anticipated new OAC, the Bayridge Center. We also welcomed the new Chinatown Older Adult Center which was tragically destroyed by a fire three years ago but has now reopened. The continued construction of new centers bolsters New York City's commitment to older adults and increases their ability to access vital city services.

### **Mental Health Supports**

The pandemic had an outsized impact on the mental health of older adults because of the lingering effects that the social isolation—necessary to combat the virus—had on this vulnerable community. The NYC Aging Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (DGMH) provides a variety of mental health services and interventions to older adults at OACs across the city. DGMH brings mental health services into the community where older adults already gather. Licensed clinical mental health professionals employed, supervised, and hired by licensed behavioral health providers are embedded in older adult centers to offer clinical interventions and related services to older adults, who otherwise would likely not have had access to or ability to utilize these treatment modalities. Although DGMH services are provided through OACs, older adults do not need to be a member of an OAC to access critical mental health services.

The DGMH program has been expanded to 88 sites across the city. We know that access to mental health services has a positive impact. There is currently an open RFP for a new contract period for DGMH providers to begin on July 1, 2023. The RFP recently closed on March 9, and we look forward to soon making awards for providers across six catchment areas serving the five boroughs.

### **Caregiver Services**

The pandemic has been challenging for everyone, and the strain on caregivers has been significant. NYC Aging's caregiver support program offers support groups, counseling, trainings, outreach, and information services to unpaid caregivers. Many older adults are caretakers for their aging parent. Many are caregivers who also have full time jobs. The program aims to educate, provide or connect to the wide range of supports caregivers might need. The caregiver program offers options for respite care through home care or participation in social adult day care. In 2017, we estimated that there are 1.3 million New Yorkers who function as a caregiver. Without the respite care, many of these caretakers would not have the financial means or ability to leave the care receiver in someone else's care while they take a needed break from their caregiving responsibilities.

We know that the cost of maintaining an older adult in institutionalized care is far higher when compared to the cost of community care options such as supporting caregivers. Not only is it more beneficial to the long-term health and well-being of an older adult to remain at home and age in place, but it makes financial sense as well. It costs, on average, \$160,980 to house an older adult in institutionalized care whereas the average cost of community care services is roughly \$32,000 per person per year. In FY 24, funding for the caregiver program is currently projected to be \$8.1 million. Caregiver supports positively impact the health and wellbeing of older adults while aligning with the cultural background of the individual. As the aging population continues to diversify and age in place, investments in caregiver supports are important and beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

I continue to be proud of the great work that NYC Aging and our providers accomplish with our resources. The last few years has highlighted the resiliency of older adults, as well as the system gaps that should be strengthened in order to fully allow people to live in their communities as long as they desire. I look forward to continuing to explore ways to match services to the increased demands. We are excited to continue to innovate services and respond to the changing needs of our city.

As always, we are grateful to the Chairs and the Committees for your advocacy and continued partnership to support our older New Yorkers. Thank you.





PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**Jumaane D. Williams**

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**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON AGING  
MARCH 14, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee on Aging for holding this hearing.

The Department for the Aging has done a tremendous job in assisting aging New Yorkers through a pandemic. However, the low salaries for staff, such as caseworkers and support staff, has led to staff shortages and a breakdown in services for some. A recently released report by the Office of the New York City Comptroller found that the Department for the Aging's In Home Services division has one of the highest vacancy rates in all teams across mayoral agencies<sup>1</sup>. This directly affects older adults relying on home-delivered meals and casework. According to the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, the 1,413,178 home meals delivered in FY22 "demonstrates a continuing need for home delivered meals." The combination of high demand for home delivered meals with low capacity is a dangerous mix.

A portion of home delivered meals are culturally competent meals. DFTA has done a great job expanding culturally competent meals. However, providers of culturally competent meals are not fairly being compensated for their work. During the New York City Council Committee on Aging's December 14th, 2022 public testimony section, India Home, a not-for-profit organization addressing the needs of South Asian senior citizens in Queens, explained that their meals are only covered 80% by the City. The other 20%, the older adult center has to cover themselves. India Home offers culturally competent meals that south asian community members enjoy receiving.

Culturally competent meals are especially important as a connection for older adults who are immigrants, which is a large number of older adults in New York today. A report done by Center for an Urban Future found that "the number of older immigrants statewide is growing at nearly double the rate of U.S.-born older adults<sup>2</sup>". The City of New York must support the providers of culturally competent meals, which are older adult centers in diverse neighborhoods.

There have been discussions in previous hearings about expanding the grab and go meals program. The Office of the Public Advocate supports providers who are calling on the City to expand the program. Grab and go meals increase attendance in older adult centers, as stated by many providers in the New York City Council Committee on Aging's December 14th, 2022 public testimony section. Additionally, grab and go

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<sup>1</sup> <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/understaffed-underserved/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nycfuture.org/research/keeping-pace-with-an-aging-new-york-state#:~:text=Concerningly%2C%20this%20analysis%20also%20finds,reversing%20years%20of%20steady%20declines.>



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# Jumaane D. Williams

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meals make sense for smaller older adult centers where participants are close together and are more susceptible to airborne illnesses.

Poverty is increasing among older New Yorkers, and we must do everything possible to reverse the trend<sup>3</sup>. The Retirement Research Foundation found that “One third of older adult households have no money left each month or are in debt after meeting essential expenses<sup>4</sup>”. Home delivered meals, culturally competent meals, and Grab and Go meals are all key ways to feed older adults who cannot feed themselves. Thus, the Office of the Public Advocate will echo the asks by the AARP of New York, and other advocacy groups, to increase the funding for in-home services such as home delivered meals by \$5 million, have a liveable wage as a baseline for reimbursements for older adult center staff (150% of minimum wage), and increase the rate of reimbursement for older adult food cost by 20% so that older adult centers can buy more food to meet the demand.

I look forward to working with the Department for the Aging, the Mayor’s Office, and the City Council to ensure our city’s older adults have the services they need to be healthy and active.

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup><https://nycfuture.org/research/keeping-pace-with-an-aging-new-york-state#:~:text=Concerningly%2C%20this%20analysis%20also%20finds,reversing%20years%20of%20steady%20declines>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2022/09/09/rising-rents-are-squeezing-older-adults/?sh=4713c8172240>



## **Asian American Federation**

### **Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Aging**

*March 14th, 2023*

#### Written Testimony

I want to thank Chair Hudson and the Council Members of the Aging Committee for holding this hearing and giving the Asian American Federation (AAF) the opportunity to testify on the needs of our older adult community. I am Ravi Reddi, Associate Director of Advocacy and Policy at AAF, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

Going into FY 2024, older adults continue to face a number of challenges, from a teetering economy to continuing anti-Asian hate. Our Seniors Working Group, the first and only Asian older-adult-focused advocacy coalition in New York State, led by AAF, is made up of 12 Asian-led, Asian older-adult-serving member organizations. This group served nearly 306,964 Asian older adults in 2022, 120,166 of whom were low-income. Asian older adults comprise 13.7% of the city's older adult population, and 24.7% of Asian older adults live in poverty. Of our older adults in poverty, 28.8% live alone and 83.5% have limited English proficiency (LEP).

Asian older adults are heavily targeted by anti-Asian violence. In the face of dual pandemics of COVID-19 and anti-Asian violence, both of which uniquely target Asian older adults, our older adults need support that fully addresses their needs, physically and emotionally. And as our partners in the Asian community can attest, these dual crises are fundamentally changing the behavior of clients as they seek out older adult services; the City must adapt in support of our older adult service providers.

Food insecurity is one of the top concerns for Asian older adults within our Seniors Working Group, alongside anti-Asian violence, older adult centers, and mental health, all of which are connected. Culturally competent meal programs have become our older adults' lifeline, especially amid an era of increased anti-Asian violence that have left older adults understandably terrified to leave their homes. This makes it even more critical that our older adults are receiving as much support as they can every time they interact with one of their trusted CBOs. The meal programs our CBOs offer not only give them an opportunity to pick up food or eat together, but also to participate in social activities, receive assistance applying for services, and access health and mental health care.

While Asian New Yorkers comprise at least 10% of the population in more than half of City Council districts, with the other half having some of the fastest-growing Asian populations, we always highlight the fact that from Fiscal Year 2002 to 2014, the Asian American community received a mere 1.4% of the total dollar value of New York City's social service contracts, a reflection of a broader, long-term trend. SWG members, in balancing the need for culturally-competent food, reopening older adult centers as the City wants, and simultaneously addressing the needs of isolated older adults, are overstretched, understaffed and risking burnout. Throughout the pandemic, our CBOs have reported more burnout among staff who are stretched to their limits with too much work and not enough institutional support.



## **Asian American Federation**

CBO staff members say meeting our most vulnerable where they are with culturally-competent, effective older adult services requires systemic change. This includes the City supporting, reinforcing, and building capacity for programming by and for marginalized communities by prioritizing cultural competency and language access in contracting processes. It also means focusing more funding on smaller contracts so the organizations providing care to our most marginalized communities have access to funds they can spend down at their size.

### Recommendations

1. Increase funding to Asian-led, Asian-serving older-adult service providers, and expand this funding to include time and expenses spent on case management and digital literacy, devices and training. Our CBOs are juggling expansion of in-person services while catering to the needs of an isolated older adult population without funding to meet the demand for both streams.
2. Prioritize funding both congregate and remote services and programming, CBO staff are stretched thin because of the City's focus on one but continued community demand for the other.
3. Continue funding a network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs that provide alternative food benefits to older-adults.
4. Expand funding to include culturally competent, in-language, and older-adult-focused non-traditional mental health service models. This includes prioritizing CBOs that have a history of providing free or subsidized nontraditional, culturally competent services for funding opportunities.

On behalf of the Asian American Federation, thank you for raising up the work that needs to be done, and prioritizing the voices and needs of our older adults and our older adult service providers, the true experts in this work. We look forward to working with all of you, and policymakers always have a standing invitation to our Seniors Working Group meetings. Thank you.

Thank you to the New York City Council for the opportunity to submit testimony as part of the March 14 Preliminary Budget Hearing of the Committee on Age. Below is written testimony on behalf of BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). BAM is deeply grateful for the Council's support of Senior Programs in FY23, which is allowing BAM to offer vibrant programs for local seniors in 2022-2023 and expand its reach to seniors with Alzheimer's, memory loss, and dementia. This year to date, BAM has launched a new season of *Senior Cinema*, scheduled an expanded array of arts and social events, delivered targeted Alzheimer's/dementia-focused training to BAM's front-of-house and Senior Programs staff, and built partnerships with several new community organizations and networks to broaden outreach. BAM respectfully requests that the city baselines the \$40 million in cultural funding that was allocated in FY23, as well as an additional \$10 million in funding this year.

We would like to briefly outline our programs.

Senior Cinema has engaged seniors from more than 100 Brooklyn senior centers through screenings in the BAM Rose Cinemas. To date, the series has included films such as: *What's Love Got to Do with It*; *Hidden Figures*; *The Third Man*; and *The Great Debater*. Upcoming spring 2023 screenings include: *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners*; *Lying Lips*; and *Finding Fela*!

On Oct. 22, 2022, BAM hosted *Embarqued: A Workshop on Art, Movement, & Identity* with choreographer and global artist Stefanie Batten Bland, held in conjunction with BAM's Next Wave presentation of Bland's dance theater work *Embarqued: Stories of Soil*. This intergenerational creative workshop paired high-school students from BAM's *Dance In Focus* after-school choreography program with seniors recruited from BAM's enthusiastic pool of *Senior Cinema* audiences. Participants completed movement exercises and painted textiles to capture their interpretations of the work into visual and pictorial forms, several of which appeared as part of the set during the five-performance run of *Embarqued* in Nov. 2022. For its *Senior Dress Rehearsal* initiative, BAM also invited senior audience members to attend a working dress rehearsal presentation of *Embarqued: Stories of Soil*.

BAM's first FY23 senior *Brush & Brunch Paint Party* took place on Feb. 17, 2023 in the BAM Fisher's Hillman Studio. While BAM had projected to host two *Brush &*

*Brunch* events over the course of the spring, feedback gathered during fall 2022 events indicated that seniors were eager for more opportunities to create art, and that many were excited to bring friends and relatives who had never attended BAM events before. In turn, BAM added one party to the schedule, for a total of three events in FY23.

BAM has planned an expanded schedule of five *Senior Social* music-centered events to be held over the course of spring 2023. This will include the following five socials: Gospel; Jazz; Motown; LGBTQ Pride; and Disco.

In April, BAM will host its second annual *Senior Literary Parlor* in the BAM Fisher Hillman Studio. The event will feature author Kaitlyn Greenidge and her new historical fiction novel *Libertie* (2022), which is inspired by the true story of one of the first Black female doctors in the US, in conversation with *Slice Literary Magazine* fiction editor Randy Winston.

BAM hosted an intensive training on effectively serving seniors with Alzheimer's/dementia and their caregivers for staff in public facing roles and their supervisors. The session included an overview of the definition and progression of dementia, short videos demonstrating common situations and ideal responses, and an open discussion in which staff members asked questions specific to their roles. One area of particular interest for BAM front-of-house staff was communicating with audience members with neurodegeneration, including approaching individuals from the front, identifying who you are, not crowding physically, and giving them ample time to reply. Having completed this training, BAM will now be able to fully promote its programming to CaringKind connect2culture audiences, enabling it to expand service to audiences with Alzheimer's or dementia. BAM has also worked with several new healthcare and social service providers to promote programs, including New York Memory Center (Gowanus); RiseBoro Community Partnership Senior Adult Day Services (Bushwick); Sunset Park Older Adult Center (Sunset Park); and Shore Hill Older Adult Center (Bay Ridge).

BAM's Senior Programs have many loyal participants who attend multiple events and event types each year. One of BAM's repeat attendees is a woman in her late 70s who lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant. She has attended *Senior Cinema* regularly for at least three years and has since become a regular at *Senior Socials*, *Brush & Brush Paint Parties*, and the *Senior Literary Parlor*. A step and line dancer who

currently dances with a troupe at her senior center, she has communicated that she is incredibly thankful for and enthusiastic about the artistic and social outlet that BAM's programs enable her to have. While she had been nervous to come out during the COVID-19 pandemic, BAM's regular events—from monthly *Senior Cinema* to bi-monthly *Senior Socials*—enabled her to go at her own pace. BAM's programs helped her get back in the habit of attending arts and social events, and she is excited every time there is something on the calendar.

BAM's programs not only engage seniors in individual events, but also promote creative engagement and a physically and socially active lifestyle. One participant stated that attending BAM's Senior Programs help to enhance and round out their regular education and recreation activities. In particular, traveling to BAM for Senior Cinema and Senior Socials is incorporated into their walking club. She confirmed that having a destination featuring food, social opportunities, and the arts provides special motivation to “get up and get out” and that it has been incredibly valuable for engaging friends and acquaintances at risk of becoming housebound to join.

We hope that you will consider the important programming that BAM provides for seniors when finalizing the cultural budget, and trust that, with your continued and increased support, we are ready to continue to serve our seniors.

Thank you for your attention and for your ongoing leadership and support.

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**Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.  
Testimony at the New York City Council Committee on Aging  
Honorable Hudson, Chair  
March 14, 2023**

Thank you Chair Hudson and the Members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 60,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

Asian Americans are the fastest growing population in New York State, and seniors are the fastest growing subset. Over 1 in 3 Asian American seniors lives under the poverty line, and over 2 in 3 are Limited English Proficient (LEP). These community members rely on community services like CPC for everything from adequate nutrition to mental health provisions. This makes the issue of aging in place of particular concern to CPC.

Throughout the pandemic, CPC senior services and CPC Senior Centers continued to operate and provide essential services to community members. Keeping health and safety as a priority, we conducted all classes in our senior programs in a remote setting. We utilized phone, Zoom video conferencing, and Wechat to communicate with our senior members.

To that end, we are grateful to testify about issues that impact the individuals and families we serve, and we are grateful to the Council for their leadership on these issues.

**CPC Brooklyn Senior Services**

CPC Brooklyn Senior Services was established in 2001 and operates out of CPC Brooklyn Community Center. Since the founding, more than 1,000 older adults aged 60 and above have participated in our activities and classes. There are currently 233 older adults enrolled at CPC Brooklyn Senior Services through our DFTA program in FY22. There are also about 180 older adults on a waiting list for enrollment. Through the pandemic, CPC Brooklyn Senior Services provided a blend of recreational and educational activities to support seniors; seniors that utilized our services experienced immeasurable improvements in their physical, social, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being. Many of the members enjoy the curriculum and continue to be dedicated in attending the virtual yoga class, singing class, ESL class, I-pad class, I-phone class, computer class, Tai-Chi class, art painting class, Chinese brush calligraphy class, monthly birthday celebration event, holiday event, and health educational workshops. In



addition to hosting classes and events for members, CPC staff also assisted members in a hybrid model with entitlement/ benefits application assistance, information referrals, and advocacy work.

Despite the pandemic's interruption with in-person services, CPC Brooklyn Senior Services maintained constant communication with senior members through different means of communication. We ensured our members had access to activities and events to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. Our senior services team routinely engaged community members in workshops and developed new and exciting activities and classes to benefit our seniors.

#### 1. Virtual Classes

On average, about 50-60 seniors attend our virtual and in-person services. 99% of our seniors participate in at least one virtual class a week. 30% of active members or 60 active members learned how to use Zoom on a computer and/or on their phone and participate in virtual workshops. We hosted 20 virtual workshops related to health, nutrition, and education topics since July 2021.

#### 2. Virtual and In-person Holiday Events and Birthday Celebrations

We hosted seven major virtual and in-person holiday events during the year for over 150 members. In addition, our program provided monthly virtual birthday celebrations since May 2020.

#### 3. Outdoor Activities

We hosted four outdoor activities in partnership with other community organizations and elected officials.

- Two GrowNYC Sunset Park green market tours (55 members participated).
- Senior Picnic Day hosted by community elected officials.
- CaringKind Walk and Donation, where we raised \$2,537 to support families with Alzheimer in September 2021.

#### 4. Fresh Produce and Meal Distribution

During the pandemic, seniors were greatly affected. As a vulnerable population, food scarcity was a huge concern. Many were afraid to leave their homes because of COVID-19 and the rise in anti Asian violence. In response, CPC partnered with various groups to provide fresh produce, hot meals, and pantry items to community members in need. We collaborated with GrowNYC to distribute fresh produce bags to older adults weekly. There are 70 members who receive half-priced or subsidized bags every week. We partner with Heart of Dinner (HoD) to provide and deliver hot meals to seniors.

#### 5. Case Assistance

Along with providing group activities and events, the senior service team also assists seniors with their individual needs and cases (senior benefits, letters translation, benefit apply and application assistance and follow up, referrals, etc). We have on average 32 older adults who receive assistance per month. We make about 200 wellness calls a week to check-in with our members and ask about their well-being.

**CPC urges the Council to increase funding for senior programs because this is an extremely vulnerable population and without the support of senior centers, they are often left in the dark.** We must protect our most vulnerable and ensure that they are properly supported as the City rebuilds from the pandemic.

#### **Testimony from a member of CPC Brooklyn Senior Services**

Mr. Wang, a 64 year-old senior, first immigrated to the United States in 1999. As a new immigrant lost in a foreign country, he was homeless and had difficulty overcoming language barriers. This prevented him from seeking eligible benefit resources. Extremely unhappy with his situation, Mr. Wang came to CPC Brooklyn Community Services with hopes of finding options for a better life.

Worker met him at CPC Brooklyn office on November 2018. He was one of our senior members. He lived in man shelter since 2018, which is only a temporary residence for him. He could not stay there during the day, which made him upset. CPC staff notified him he can apply a senior house or NYCHA house, which is an ideal place for him due to his limited income.

After understanding the status and needs of Mr. Wang, CPC staff assisted Mr. Wong to complete several housing applications. He was eligible on the waiting lists of 3 senior housing. Meanwhile the social worker from the man shelter assisted him applied the CityFHEPS Rent Supplement for him. Due to the language barrier, CPC staff kept in touch with Mr. Wong to encourage him to speak up his feeling and concerns about the housing status. CPC staff assisted him by translating and preparing documentations for the interview. Almost every week Mr. Wong met with CPC staff at the CPC Brooklyn office. He trusted the services that CPC provided. CPC staff followed up his case very closely. Step by Step through, CPC staff assistance led to Mr. Wong finally receiving the approval letter for CityFHEPS Rent Supplement in September, 2019. In January 2020, Mr. Wong moved into a staple place that provided by CityFHEPS.

Recently, Mr. Wong also received mail from NYCHA about the housing interview. That will a hope for Mr. Wong to have a long term place to live. Mr. Wong was very thankful to share it with CPC. CPC staff will continue to assist Mr. Wong with housing interview, and hoping him to move into a NYCHA housing sooner.

The current life of Mr. Wang is very fulfilling. In addition to participating in ESL and Ipad classes, he also participates in sports. As he said, "CPC is like his family; the same care and warmth he received made his life change for the better. He does not feel lonely anymore.

#### **CPC Nan Shan Senior Center**

At Nan Shan Senior Center, we distributed food to seniors every Thursday. COVID-19 has severely impacted our seniors. Food insecurity has been a growing issue for seniors and the pandemic aggravated this issue. Since March 2020, CPC has distributed over 108,000 pounds of food to community members across the five boroughs. At Nan Shan, there is always a long line of older adults waiting for meals. For some seniors, the meals provided by senior centers are often their only reliable source of nourishment. Congregate meals are developed to be 70% of daily nutritional value for this purpose. **In order to address the growing food insecurity in**

**our communities, CPC urges the Council to increase funding for food access to vulnerable populations.** Centers like CPC are great locations to distribute meals and produce because we are known in the community and community members come to us with their needs and concerns.

Secondly, as a vulnerable community, seniors struggle to find the support they need. Many seniors are concerned about the spread of COVID-19 and are afraid to leave their homes. This isolation causes several emotional mental health concerns. Therefore, it is vital for organizations like CPC to conduct wellness checks and provide online opportunities for seniors to engage with one another and not feel as isolated. While mental health is often seen as a taboo in the Asian communities, it is nonetheless important to have these resources readily available for seniors to access. **We urge the Council to provide a mental health counselor at every DFTA operated senior centers so seniors who have these concerns can get them addressed.**

Furthermore, there has also been an uptick in elder abuse cases during the pandemic. Unfortunately, many of these cases go unreported. There are many forms of abuse and many seniors are not even aware of the abuse. In addition with mental health traumas, this abuse makes it increasingly difficult to speak out. **We urge the Council to fund elder abuse prevention and fund new initiatives around elder abuse prevention in order to educate the community on elder abuse, how to prevent it, and how to stop it from happening.**

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to speak about issues that impact the seniors we serve. We are grateful to your leadership on these issues and look forward to working with you on them.

If you have any questions, please contact Carlyn Cowen at [ccowen@cpc-nyc.org](mailto:ccowen@cpc-nyc.org)



## **TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS**

**Before the New York City Council Aging Committee  
Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair  
Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 14, 2023**

**Submitted by:  
Jeanette Estima  
Director, Policy and Advocacy  
Citymeals on Wheels**

### **Overview**

My name is Jeanette Estima, and I am the Director, Policy and Advocacy at Citymeals on Wheels. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Citymeals was established in New York City in 1981 as a unique public private model to fill a critical gap in the City's home delivered meal program, which provides only one meal per day, five days a week, excluding weekends and holidays. Since then, Citymeals has become the emergency responder for homebound older adults, beginning with 9/11 and continuing throughout the pandemic.

The need for this program has increased over the past years, and even as we have been adjusting to our new post-pandemic reality, many older adults continue to need meals delivered to them. Prior to the pandemic Citymeals was serving 18,000 older adults; today we are serving 20,000. This is in addition to the general growth in the program we have seen over the years

as the population across the country ages, and that continues to this day. Moreover, as the number of climate related emergencies has grown, the number of emergencies we have responded to has grown.

In addition to serving more people, and responding to more emergencies, we have experienced a staggering increase in our costs due to inflation. In FY22 Citymeals' food costs increased 33 percent and our fuel costs nearly doubled. Maintaining our current level of service under these extraordinary circumstances is untenable. Therefore, we respectfully request the following investments in FY24:

- **\$800,000** through the Senior Centers, Programs, and Enhancements Initiative to ensure that our emergency response infrastructure is adequately funded
  - This includes a renewal of \$500,000 through the council initiative, and \$200,000 received through the Speaker's Initiative, and an enhancement of \$100,000
- **\$4 million** in the budget allocated for Citymeals weekend and holiday meals

Finally, the entire network of service providers that ensure that older adults are able to age in place is under extreme pressure caused by increased needs, increased costs, and the low-wages dictated in their contracts with the City. Therefore, to ensure that providers are able to hire and retain the staffing levels required to meet the needs of older New Yorkers, we urge the City to **establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for City-contracted human services workers.**

### **The Citymeals on Wheels Model**

Citymeals on Wheels was founded 41 years ago to fill a significant gap in city services, securing funding to provide weekend and holiday meals to those homebound older adults unable to shop and cook for themselves. While the Department for the Aging funds the one daily meal that homebound older adults receive Mondays through Fridays (excluding holidays), Citymeals funds the same network of providers to deliver weekend, holiday, and emergency meals. *Without Citymeals, the most vulnerable older New Yorkers would not have a meal for about 115 days each year.* On a 3-day holiday weekend, the most isolated older adults could go 3 straight days without a meal; and, in times of emergencies, they could go even longer without food or contact with another person. To bridge this gap, Citymeals raises around \$25 million to fund about 2 million emergency, weekend, and holiday meals annually.

In addition to providing food on weekends and holidays, Citymeals has become a citywide emergency responder for older adults, beginning with 9/11. In 2018, the opening of our Bronx warehouse solidified this role by giving us the capacity to store up to 10,000 packed and ready meals, and enough food to quickly package up to 60,000 more meals.. With this level of inventory, we can pre-supply existing program participants with nutritious, shelf-stable meals and respond to those in temporary need during extreme weather, an emergency closure, or a suspension of meal delivery service. We can turn on a dime to reach large numbers of older adults in senior housing facilities, NYCHA housing, or Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), as well as individuals living across the five boroughs. We have stepped up during citywide emergencies like Hurricane Ida, as well as more localized emergencies such as a power or gas outage. Time and again, we have illustrated the value of our agile and resourceful model.

Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than the Covid-19 pandemic, which rendered thousands of older adults effectively homebound when it very suddenly became unsafe for them to be in most public spaces. They were no longer able to access their usual food programs, such as lunches at an older adult center, or food pantries. We delivered our first emergency meals on March 5, 2020, at least a week before the city shut down, because we anticipated that something could happen which would leave older New Yorkers without enough food on hand. Throughout the pandemic, we delivered over 6 million meals to the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

In FY22, Citymeals responded to 80 emergencies with over 59,000 meals, and pre-supplied program participants with over 66,000 meals in our seasonal emergency meal packages. This is what we do, and what we hope to keep doing. Citymeals has the infrastructure and stands ready for the next emergency, provided we can access the additional funding that makes our nimble model possible.

### **More than a Meal**

Community-based meals on wheels providers ensure that older New Yorkers have nutritious meals that support their health and that they are checked-in on most days. The check-in can be almost as important as the meals. The pandemic exacerbated social isolation for this population who could not participate in many of the alternative ways we all stayed connected, like picnicking in parks or zoom parties. Unable to socialize or see family, or even risk a trip to the doctor, for two years was devastating and added another layer of stress for these older adults who were already coping with chronic health issues, income insecurity, and hunger.

Meals are brought to homebound older adults by volunteers and paid staff—some of whom have been on the same route for many years. They come to know the older adults on their route, they know their routines, and often they can tell if something isn't right. This is a strength of the Citymeals model: by funding the same community organizations who deliver meals during the week, we maintain a continuity of service that allows connections and trust to develop. These relationships are a critical component of our city's care infrastructure.

For the most isolated older adults, their meal deliverer is a lifeline. If a person does not come to the door, deliverers will call them and/or notify program directors, who in turn ensure that the person's case manager follows up with them. The sense of security that this check-in can bring to someone who otherwise feels alone and invisible cannot be overstated. That knock on the door and the ensuing chit chat provides a sense of connection to the outside world, and the comfort of knowing that someone is looking out for them.

## **The Need**

There are more than 1.7 million New York City residents over the age of 60—that's one in five New Yorkers. Increased life expectancy is a testimony to the achievements of modern science, technology, and even the social safety net. Living longer and on a fixed income presents a wide-ranging set of needs from healthcare to mobility restrictions to food insecurity. For our recipients this could look like not being able to see well enough to cook their own meals, being unable to safely walk to the store or carry groceries home, or not having someone who can come by regularly to help with these tasks. We can confidently predict, then, that more and more people will be coming



onto the HDM rolls in the years to come—indeed we have already been seeing a steady increase for years.

Being unable to shop for groceries or prepare your own meals does not warrant institutionalization; these needs can be effectively managed through a network of community services and supports. And remaining at home is not only the overwhelming preference of older adults, it's also better for their overall wellbeing, and of course, much more cost effective—for both the person and the City—than moving into a nursing home.

In addition to this rapidly growing need, inflation has driven up the cost of food and fuel further straining our ability to feed hungry, homebound older New Yorkers. In FY22, our food costs increased 33% and our fuel costs nearly doubled. While we have increased our fundraising efforts, private fundraising cannot keep pace with this need, and we urgently require the support of our partners in city government to ensure we can continue to feed the most vulnerable older New Yorkers. Therefore, **we are requesting \$4 million in the City budget allocated to Citymeals** to meet the growing need for weekend and holiday meals not covered under existing NYC Aging contracts.

While the pandemic highlighted the need for emergency, supplemental food for our recipients the need is still here and growing, even as the pandemic wanes. For example, the number of climate events that create enough damage that people become unable to leave their homes to get food, whether due to power outages or unsafe streets, has grown. *The homebound older adult population is not regularly, directly served by any other citywide emergency feeding groups.* Citymeals is the only provider who can respond, at scale, to emergencies across New York City. Therefore, it is

critical that Citymeals can continue to pre-supply emergency food that can be kept in a cabinet for more minor emergencies, and quickly respond to bigger emergencies with truckloads of 3-meal bags. **Therefore, we respectfully request \$800,000 through the Senior Centers, Programs, and Enhancements Initiative to fund Citymeals' emergency meals program.**

### **Sector-wide Needs**

Citymeals joins our partners across the network of older adult service providers in advocating for a city where we can all safely remain in our communities and continue to contribute to its diverse social and economic fabric as we age. To achieve this vision, we must build a robust infrastructure of community-based services such as older adult centers, mental health care, transportation, homecare, and caregiver support.

It cannot be overstated that nonprofit human services providers are a lifeline for the City and its residents of all ages; the sector's tenacity, resourcefulness, and expertise was on full display during the pandemic. Yet the City continues to underfund the services it relies on nonprofit providers to deliver, harming not only the programs but also the workers whose low wages fail to reflect the essential nature of their work. To shore up the nonprofit providers that implement the City's critical human services programs, we support the ask of the #JustPay campaign to **establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)** across all human services contracts.

We thank the City Council for your continued partnership in ensuring that homebound older New Yorkers have food to eat 365 days a year and are not forgotten during emergencies.



## CONNECT

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March 14, 2023

### Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Aging

Greetings *Committee Chair Council Member Hudson* and members of The Committee on Aging. Thank you for your time this morning and for your continued work to make NYC a safer, more equitable city.

My name is Quentin Walcott, Executive Director of CONNECT, a nonprofit organization based in Harlem that works with NYC's communities to prevent interpersonal violence and promote gender justice. CONNECT's mission is to create safe families and peaceful communities by transforming the beliefs, behaviors, and institutions that perpetuate violence.

Race and gender analysis is the foundation of what we do, and informs every program. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a prevalent issue that is neither a private nor only a woman's or younger population's issue. According to city data, the NYPD responded to 231,763 domestic incident reports (DIRs).<sup>1</sup> Domestic violence homicides increased by nearly 7% in 2021.<sup>2</sup> The ages of those doing the harm and those harmed reached up to 86 years.<sup>3</sup> A study conducted by the Department for the Aging and other agencies found that 76 in 1,000 New York state residents over age 60 were victims of elder abuse during a one-year period.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear intimate partner and domestic violence affect every age group. That is why over the years, CONNECT has developed partnerships with more than 200 community organizations throughout New York City, including senior centers and programs. Our work has helped senior New Yorkers who are survivors of intimate partner violence, domestic violence in various ways:

- One woman who has attended CONNECT's monthly workshop for women at Elmcot Senior Center since 2016 suffered a lot of childhood trauma due to violence and is a survivor of IPV, as well. She has said that she feels like our workshop is a safe space to share her pain and heal, and that she mentally feels better sharing. She wishes she had this workshop earlier in her life because her trauma impacted her throughout her life.
- Another senior, a mother of four who was experiencing IPV, was going through divorce while attending our workshop at Seaside Older Adult Center. She said our

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, ENDGBV 2021 Fact Sheet, 2021, [nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/Annual-Fact-Sheet-2021.pdf](https://nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/Annual-Fact-Sheet-2021.pdf), accessed 3/11/23

<sup>2</sup> Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, New York City Domestic Violence Fatality Review, 2022 Annual Report, p. 3, 2022 [nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2022-Annual-FRC-Report.pdf](https://nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2022-Annual-FRC-Report.pdf), accessed 3/11/23

<sup>3</sup> Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, New York City Domestic Violence Fatality Review, 2022 Annual Report, p. 8, 2022 [nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2022-Annual-FRC-Report.pdf](https://nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2022-Annual-FRC-Report.pdf), accessed 3/11/23

<sup>4</sup> NYS Dept. of Aging, et al., Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study, 2011, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/UndertheRadar2011.pdf>, accessed 3/11/23

workshop helped her to feel more empowered in her decision to get a divorce from her abusive husband.

- A male senior who has attended CONNECT's men's group at Parkchester Enhancement Program for four years opened up during a fatherhood conversation. He admitted he used to be a drug addict, abandoned his son when he was five-years-old, and tried reconnecting when his son was 30 and had a child of his own. The son, however, kept rejecting him. At our suggestion, the senior decided to go to therapy, and his therapist asked that his son join them. After a year, they are both in a better place and their focus is on the granddaughter. He said if not for the group, he would have never gone to therapy because it was not viewed as a culturally acceptable practice.

Our partner organizations and coalitions also rely on CONNECT for domestic violence and intimate partner violence training, technical assistance, capacity building and advocacy around domestic violence. In fact, many of the city's leading anti-violence organizations have sent staff to be trained at CONNECT, including: Safe Horizon, Sanctuary for Families, Violence Intervention Program, Womankind, Women for Afghan Women, RISE Project, Korean-American Family Service Center, Her Justice, and Legal Aid Society to name a few.

CONNECT's programs provide transformative support, education and training to promote women's, girls' and men's mental health and wellness. Our workshops at senior centers provide safe spaces which foster healing and empowerment, and promote gender justice and equity for senior New Yorkers. Our programs reflect our belief that transformative change must be rooted in the community, collaborative in nature and driven by those who are affected by the issue. We build the capacity of victims and survivors, activists, service professionals and people of faith to create a force-multiplier effect within their neighborhoods and organizations.

Since it is men who commit the vast majority of intimate partner violence, CONNECT believes men bear a responsibility in preventing and ending intimate partner violence and gender-based violence. As the first NYC organization to include men and boys as allies to prevent and end violence against women and girls, CONNECT moved beyond mainstream work with men as abusive partners. There have since been many similar models adopted by community-based organizations and city initiatives that involve men as allies and look at non-systems-based/non-carceral ways of addressing gender and community violence, i.e. preventative, early-intervention, and community-led solutions.

If you were to ask larger nonprofit organizations and city agencies what CONNECT brings to the table, they would in all likelihood reply "community." While most domestic violence, intimate partner violence and gender violence organizations focus on crisis-based services *after* an incident has occurred, CONNECT strongly believes these risks can be reduced by training and building the capacity of communities and organizations to respond to violence, and collectively develop strategies to address and *prevent* domestic, intimate partner, and gender violence.

CONNECT looks forward to our continued collaboration with the Committee on Aging agencies and NYC. Thank you very much for your time and attention.



**New York City Council Committee on Aging  
Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony  
March 14, 2023**

Speaker Adams, Majority Leader Powers, Chairperson Hudson and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of New York City's older adult community on behalf of Dancewave, a trusted non-profit arts service organization.

For twenty eight years, Dancewave has played an integral role our city's cultural community, serving over 6,200 New Yorkers each year through supportive, high-quality dance and whole-person development programs at the Dancewave Center located in Gowanus, Brooklyn, and in numerous public schools, community centers and senior centers throughout all five boroughs. Dancewave is an essential service provider that promotes a vibrant and healthy community, fully inclusive of our city's over 1M older adults. **We have been able to provide consistent and accessible cultural services to older adult populations in large part through the investment of city agencies and our local City Council members.**

Staying physically, mentally, and emotionally active are the key components of supporting overall health, well-being, and quality of life as we age. Dancewave's programs are thoughtfully designed, suitable for movers of all ages and abilities. One of our signature older adult programs, *Dance for Life*, is designed to improve motor skills, balance, flexibility, and range of motion while teaching new movement skills. In leading participants through coordinated movements such as dancing, we are able to boost participants' brain and neurocognitive function by employing memorization, coordination, and critical thinking. *Dance for Life* participants demonstrate improvement in their energy levels, moods, and sleep; many experience weight control which can decrease risk factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease. Our program achieves all of these great benefits in addition to celebrating and educating participants on the cultural significance of different dance forms, including but not limited to Latin dances, African Diasporic forms, and Chinese dance. As a result, program participants develop a sense of belonging, and report feeling valued, safe, calm and in control of their bodies. These experiences are important and necessary for everyone - especially older adults - and are accessible through arts-based programs such as *Dance for Life*.

As the fiscal year 2024 budgeting process is now underway, we urge the New York City Council to advocate for increased funding to strategically expand the essential work of arts and cultural organizations like Dancewave who directly serve and care for our city's many older adults. **This investment is necessary for the overall health and vibrancy of New York City, and will provide innumerable mental and physical health benefits to one of our city's most vulnerable and underserved populations.**

Thank you,

Executive Director



Testimony of Educational Alliance  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services  
New York City Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Councilmember Crystal Hudson, Chair  
Submitted March 14, 2023

Thank you Chair Hudson and members of the Aging Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Elizabeth Bird and I am the Director of Public Policy at Educational Alliance, a settlement house with community centers located throughout the Lower East Side and East Village that offer individuals and families high-quality, multi-generational programs and services that enhance their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities.

Educational Alliance is guided by the principle that each person is born with a divine spark of dignity and creativity; this belief is central to our older adult services which encourage healthy living and social engagement through the arts, drama, fitness, cooking and much more.

Our Older Adult Services are supported by contracts with NYC Aging. These contracts help fund programs in our three centers for older adults: the Sirovich Center for Balanced Living, the Weinberg Center for Balanced Living, and the Co-op Village Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC). Our older adult centers provide daily meals, arts and exercise classes, education, health and nutrition programs, case work, mental health counseling, and civic engagement opportunities to over 3,000 older adults annually. And like NORCs throughout the City, our Co-op Village provides education, health screening and preventive services, doctor referrals, and case management support. Our annual Celebrate Arts festival brings together all our older adult programming sites and demonstrates art as a source of collective healing and focus of community.

Investments in older adults benefit everyone. Not only do our programs benefit older adults directly, they alleviate pressure on families, caretakers, and other support systems that also provide care for older adults. In particular, preventive health offerings help older adults avoid costly institutionalized nursing homes and emergency care. The future of New York City depends on all New Yorkers being able to age with dignity, so my testimony today will focus on **five critical investments the City must make for older adults:**

- Right-size the **NYC Aging budget** to reflect cost increases due to inflation
- Preserve and expand the **Geriatric Mental Health Initiative**
- Increase funding for programs that **help New Yorkers age in their homes**
- **Expand workforce opportunities** within Older Adult Care
- Invest in capital needs for spaces used by older adult programs

You belong here.

## NYC Aging Budget

The funding provided through NYC Aging is so critical for the health and well-being of the older adults we serve. Membership in our programs has expanded exponentially in the past decade, and our direct service staff is working harder than ever to provide new and expanded services to meet the enormous needs facing older adults due to the pandemic. Yet our contracts only cover a portion of the costs of the services we offer, with funding gaps closed through philanthropic and discretionary funds from Council Members.

This year, with significant increases for the cost of food and supplies due to inflation, our budgets are stretched even more thinly, and we are sometimes forced to make difficult programming decisions. For example, we have a persistent need for translators who can translate programming for our diverse community members. A large percent of our clients speak a language other than English, primarily Mandarin, Cantonese, and Russian, and it is critical that we offer translation to ensure equal access to all our programming. Yet an additional line item for desperately needed translators must not preclude equally necessary positions, like nursing staff or social workers.

NYC Aging directly benefits millions of New Yorkers yet has the smallest operating budget citywide. This disparity is in part a reflection of an ageist culture that disregards the important work – and the true cost – of providing robust services to people as they age with dignity.

We urge the City to:

- **Increase the overall NYC Aging budget** to adequately support the work we do, specifically, add \$38.4 million in new funding for older adult services to **address rising costs due to inflation**;
- **Maintain discretionary funding** for aging service programs in every district. This funding is so critical to the work we do and we could not continue to provide the high quality programs we do without it.

## Geriatric Mental Health Initiative

In our older adult centers, we have seen a dramatic increase in the need for mental health services since the pandemic; many of our clients are affected by bereavement and loss. Many others are struggling from the stress and anxiety of increased violence against older adults and crimes against older adults of color in particular.

The Geriatric Mental Health Initiative has provided critical funding for counseling and support. As more people become aware of the mental health services that are available, older adults are more likely to ask for help. We rely on this program and believe it should be expanded specifically to hire professionals trained in support for older adults who live with untreated mental health diagnoses and those who are experiencing memory loss.

We urge the City to:

- **Restore funding for the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative at \$3.4 million**

### **Increase funding for programs that help New Yorkers age in their homes**

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities are a proven model for helping older adults live independently in their own homes and communities. But our NORCs have not had a recent budget increase and struggle with increased costs due to inflation. Increasingly we struggle to offer competitive wages to retain the skilled staff that are required.

To be able to age in their homes, older New Yorkers must be able to continue to afford living in their homes while on a fixed income. The City's current housing crisis is especially dangerous for older adults and we continue to see an increase in clients who face housing court, evictions, and homelessness.

We urge the City to:

- **Increase funding for NORCs** across the City
- Create **more affordable senior housing**.
- **Install safety features in NYCHA apartments** and create a fund for low-income New Yorkers to apply for grants to help pay for retrofitting homes
- **Automatically enroll eligible older adults in SCRIE** (Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption) and SCHE (Senior Citizen Homeowners Exemption) and raise the earnings cap for eligibility.

### **Expand workforce opportunities within Older Adult Care**

As the population of older adults increases in the City, we must have a strong workforce of professionals who support and care for older adults. Yet our current contracts with NYC Aging set insufficient wages to hire and retain case managers, social workers, and translators. These positions require skilled, highly-trained professionals with advanced degrees -- workers who can command higher salaries in private hospitals or other settings than City-contracted community based organizations. Additionally, as the workforce has adjusted to remote work, we need to be able to offer higher salaries for individuals who provide in-person direct services. We experience significantly longer vacancy periods to fill an open position for a social worker or nurse, yet NYC Aging has not allowed us to adjust our budgets to accommodate increased salaries.

We urge the City to:



- **Increase salaries for City-contracted case managers and social workers** at parity with industry standards;
- Provide an **automatic cost of living adjustment** across all human services contracts each year;
- Establish robust and affordable **professional education opportunities** for social workers through partnerships with schools of social work within New York, to attract a diverse pool of candidates into the field. Incentives like tuition-reimbursement, stipends, and housing vouchers could off-set the costs of higher education that are often prohibitive for enticing individuals into the field.

### Capital needs

Lastly, we have a long list of spaces that require capital repairs and improvements, from smaller upgrades to lighting and sound systems, to larger renovations. These improvements are needed to keep our spaces and equipment in good condition, to be used and enjoyed by older adults for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

*NYC Council Committee on Aging - Preliminary Budget Hearing*

*March 14, 2023*

*Testimony by Jeremy Kaplan, Executive Director of Encore Community Services*

**Good Afternoon, Councilmembers.**

My name is Jeremy Kaplan, and I'm the Executive Director of Encore Community Services. Encore is a nonprofit that provides life saving nutritious meals to older adults on Manhattan's West Side. We serve hundreds of thousands of meals a year to older adults at our centers and through the Home Delivered Meals program. During the COVID emergency, Encore stepped up and ran the recovery meals program across three boroughs.

Meal recipients are older adults who can't leave their homes. They are often immunocompromised, live on fixed incomes, and are isolated. **All of them deserve to have food to eat.** At Encore Community Services, we believe that every older adult should be well nourished and connected to community, so that they may age in place, with dignity, for as long as possible. Unfortunately, our ability to deliver on this mission for an "Encore for Life" is hampered by the cumulative effects of years of underinvestment in the aging services.

I'm here today to raise the alarm about the severe systemic risk to services for the aging. The sector's nonprofits are approaching a crisis, and some may even struggle with solvency if things do not change.

Our population is aging rapidly, already placing a strain on limited organizational resources. At the same time, functional budget cuts to NYC Aging Services are taking a further toll on operations. We've seen the fastest and highest period of price increases in a generation, and are being asked to do substantially more with considerably less.

Operational costs have skyrocketed, including 90 percent increases in the cost of providing home-delivered meals and 20 percent increases in the cost of providing meals at older adult centers. Yet, the rate of reimbursement increases we've seen this year don't even meet the minimum we requested nearly two years ago.

**Additionally, it has become imminently unsustainable to provide weekend meals, but we continue to do so because our clients often rely on us as their only source of nourishment. To give you a sense of how dire the circumstances are, Encore has already maxed out our annual budget for meals. We urgently need the reimbursement rates to increase.**

Champions like Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez have worked minor miracles in years past to support the tapestry of nonprofits like Encore that serve older adults in our city. Without renewed investment, however, minor miracles won't be enough.

We urge Mayor Adams to address the critical short-term funding gap for older adult meal providers in FY2023, and to fully fund NYC Aging's Community Care Plan for FY2024. **We need the city of New York to truly make a long-term investment in Older Adults.**

I appreciate your time and consideration.



## Commitment to Improve the Quality of Life

Monday, March 13, 2023

**To: New York City Council Committee on Aging**  
**From: India Home, Inc.**  
**Re: Culturally Competent Senior Support Services for Older Adults**

Good afternoon Aging Chair Hudson and all Committee on Aging council members and staff present today. I am here today on behalf of India Home, a Queens-based nonprofit dedicated to serving vulnerable South Asian and Indo-Caribbean immigrant older adults across NYC. Since our inception, we have touched the lives of over 5,000 older adults through our holistic and culturally competent programs such as congregate meals, senior center services, case management, mental health services, advocacy, and educational and recreational activities.

Over the past two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the needs of our community have grown two-fold and so have the number of cases we are dealing with in our Case Management department. Safe & accessible public transportation, culturally competent affordable & nutritious food, emotional & wellness support, and benefits related assistance have been the highest reported needs among seniors served at India Home. In 2022, we served more than 1000 seniors with case management services and assisted in 111+ Access-A-Ride cases, 124+ SNAP/ food stamp cases, 100+ Health/ Wellness support cases and 85+ Benefits & Entitlement Assistance (i.e. housing vouchers, SSI/ SSDI Benefits, citizenship applications, etc.) related cases. Accessible transportation ranks as the highest priority of our seniors, as this impacts their ability to get to their desired destinations such as doctors appointments, meeting family and friends, attending programs/ events at our centers, and completing daily errands that may require commuting. Many seniors are still hesitant to visit in-person at centers or stay for longer periods of time to participate in center-based activities due to the lack of adequate transportation methods that they feel safe and comfortable using in order to get to and depart from centers.

Since August 2022, we have primarily relied upon DFTA's Access-A-Ride paratransit services to meet the transportation needs of our clients. **While accessing this service is relatively easy, many elders in our community have a challenging time navigating the Access-A-Ride booking processes and policies on their own.** Our Caseworkers currently help to book rides on behalf of seniors, including scheduling seniors for pick-up and drop-off at their desired destinations. However, this process is unnecessarily time-consuming, inconvenient, and limiting on the independence and mobility of our members to commute to wherever they need, whenever they need. Many of our seniors have also expressed experiencing poor quality, unsatisfactory, and/ or complicated service when receiving Access-A-Ride services, which has led to underutilization of this service and adversely affected their ability to attend our centers more frequently throughout the week, stay for a longer time, and/ or get to other important daily life commitments that require commuting. One of our senior's was once unfairly charged \$30 when she arrived for her Access-A-Ride trip because she arrived three minutes later than the scheduled time and was

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recorded as a “no-show.” The current fare for Paratransit/Access-A-Ride is only \$2.75 and there is a required minimum 5 minute wait time for passengers to board the vehicle. Our senior had an important doctor’s appointment that day and tried to book a new Access-A-Ride trip, but was refused same-day scheduling even after explaining her situation. She missed her doctor’s appointment that day and had to wait until a few weeks later for a new appointment. Access-A-Ride itself can be inefficient and does not always arrive or depart in a timely manner, yet it holds strict punctuality & timeliness standards upon seniors who use this service. Those who live far from our centers and rely on Access-A-Ride for transportation, are at greater risk as they are not able to attend center programs on time and/or regularly, as such they give up on coming in-person often and are more inclined to stay home.

For general case management related needs, we realize many of our older adults who have low English language proficiency (LEP) face language and literacy barriers to accessing benefits. Our Bangladeshi seniors specifically, many of whom are LEP learners and have very low, if at all, literacy rates in their own native language (i.e. Bengali) due to lack of having an education in their homelands, thus leading to huge literacy and language barrier needs when navigating for necessary services and benefits they are eligible for. In our Desi Senior Center, approximately 70% or more of the Bangladeshi senior members we serve have little to no literacy proficiency in Bengali, let alone English, and therefore rely greatly on our culturally and linguistically competent Bengali and other South Asian-speaking Case Workers to help them read, understand, access, and apply/ recertify for benefits and support services they eligible for.

Another major need of the seniors we serve is access to greater food security and nutrition. In 2022, we provided over 7,900 Halal/ vegetarian/ Jain home delivered meals and over 7,400 Congregate meals. **Our culturally tailored food program is highly utilized among the seniors we serve, helping many to have the daily nourishment and nutrition intake they need in order to stay healthy.** Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are among the second and fourth largest ethnic groups enrolled in receiving SNAP food program benefits, as such funding for food programs such as our Congregate and home delivered meals program helps supplement the food needs of elders in the community, particularly those who are homebound and/ or arrived within five years or less in the country and, therefore, aren't eligible for SNAP benefits. We have an older adult couple who live alone in Sunnyside, Queens and are regular members of India Home. One of them had a fall and is currently bed-ridden, rendering her unable to prepare meals. Through our program, her husband is able to pick up culturally appropriate ready made meals and food and bring this home. DFTA encourages congregate meals to be served at centers, and while we follow these protocols, we have noticed that seniors want more flexibility in the ways their meals are provided, such as at our Ozone Park and Kew Gardens centers.

Sometimes, they want to pick-up their meals at the center and then consume these at home, especially in the winter months when it gets colder and darker earlier in the afternoon. This flexibility would be greatly helpful moving forward so that all seniors can optimally benefit from food

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## Commitment to Improve the Quality of Life

services provided. Along with the growing transportation and food security needs of South Asian older adults, we also recognize the increased need for expanding healthcare access and coverage, specifically for Medicare/ Medicaid enrollment among this population. Indian (17,861) and Bangladeshi (9,275) immigrants are the largest groups of recent Asian immigrants (AAF, 2022). Many seniors from these groups who recently arrived in the last five years are ineligible for health care plans like Medicare/ Medicaid until after surpassing this five-year interval of consecutive residency in NYC. These seniors often have trouble paying for medication and therefore forgo purchasing prescription medications, needed treatments, and comprehensive long-term care services due to their type or lack of insurance. Bangladeshi seniors ages 65+ are the second largest Asian ethnic group to be in poverty (19%) compared to other Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) groups, and are one of the most vulnerable in this area of need.

Additionally, through our Case Management and health services based work, we have seen a greater need for more Emotional/ Wellness/ Safe Space support services and 1:1 counseling sessions among South Asian immigrant older adults, especially among women from this community. **For many of these women, India Home is the only safe space where they can open up, relieve their tensions and stress, as well as find comfort and confidentiality speaking with our culturally and linguistically competent, South Asian-speaking Caseworkers and staff.** A majority of our individual & group wellness counseling sessions are sought after and utilized by South Asian women seniors living alone and/ or with limited family contact and kinship networks, which tremendously helps them to combat loneliness and social isolation while also receiving the emotional and mental support systems they need to age in a healthier and happier manner. We have several such seniors who visit our centers daily for this support because they are lonely in their single-unit rented homes and/ or nursing homes and have no other places to go and comfortably socialize; for over a year, one of our seniors has regularly visited our Desi Senior Center every Wednesday from 1-4pm to speak with our Bengali-speaking Caseworker and staff and partake in center-based activities. She has grown very close to our organization and is grateful for the emotional support and healing she can receive through the Safe Space environment and counseling we offer.

**The provision of culturally tailored creative aging programs are also equally important needs that are beneficial for immigrant older adults and must continue to receive adequate funding across immigrant serving older adult centers.** In 2022, India Home conducted 20463 yoga/ exercise sessions, 2539 arts classes, and 1073 technology classes, among other such creative aging offerings that are attended by 250+ in-person and virtually each week. India Home is one of the few places where diverse South Asian seniors can comfortably congregate and socialize, foster meaningful new and existing friendships, and participate in a diverse array of recreational activities (i.e. Rangoli and Madhubani painting, arts & crafts, board games such as Carrom and Luddo, low-impact dance, Bollywood karaoke, etc.) that resonate with their cultural heritage and interests. Between May to June 2022, we conducted a Mental Health assessment to understand the mental health and wellness experiences of 303 South Asians ages 55+. We

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## Commitment to Improve the Quality of Life

learned that approximately 15% and 25% of Bangladeshi participants struggled with moderate and mild depression, respectively. With more funding towards holistic and culturally competent creative aging programs such as those offered at India Home, we will be able to expand our program offerings and recruit various appropriate and well-acclaimed South Asian professional art, cooking, dance, meditation, & other such educators and reach more seniors to participate in these sessions to help enhance their overall physical and mental health.

India Home has established two new older adult centers this past year, one in Flushing and another at Woodside, Queens. We are working hard to meet growing needs and continue providing these much needed programs and services to the South Asian and wider older adult community. **However, with a total of six older adult centers running now, we need more partnership and collaboration with government agencies to be able to sustain and stabilize the future of South Asian older adults.** We ask that the Committee on Aging support increased funding for more efficient and better transportation options and/ or funding to expand our case management department to meet the growing need for transportation assistance. We also request adequate funding to be allocated for the expansion of culturally competent Halal/vegetarian meal programs, case management, and creative aging services for CBOs like ours that are serving vulnerable immigrant aging populations in the AAPI community. Appropriate funding in these areas will help us to connect more food insecure older adults to receive culturally appropriate foods, keep them mentally and physically active, and meet their mental health/ emotional support needs through in-language case management assistance and Safe Space programming.

I also wanted to share that India Home is a proud member of both the **Asian American Federation's (AAF) Seniors Working Group**, the first and only Asian senior-focused advocacy coalition, as well as the **Coalition for Asian American and Children Families (CACF) 18% & Growing Campaign**, a diverse coalition bringing together over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members. As part of these coalitions, I want to humbly request that the Committee on Aging to allocate funding proportionate to our diverse community's expansive growth and needs, as well as the Transportation, Food security, Creative Aging, Case Management, and other older adult-center direct services needs highlighted in this testimony.

**Thank you for your time and cooperation!**

Sincerely,

Vasundhara D. Kalasapudi, M.D.  
Executive Director

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Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2024  
Preliminary Budget Hearings  
Committee on Aging, 14 March 2023**

**The 18% and Growing Campaign to Fight For An Inclusive and  
Equitable Budget for the AAPI Diaspora**

Good afternoon Councilmembers, my name is Josh Bentley and I am Grants and Advocacy Coordinator with Korean Community Services. *Thank you very much to the Committee on Aging for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to testify.* I especially want to thank Chairperson Crystal Hudson, Councilmembers Christopher Marte, Kristin Richardson Jordan, Eric Dinowitz, Linda Lee, Lynn Schulman, and Darlene Mealy for hearing the testimonies today.

Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York is a proud member of the 18% and Growing Campaign, a critical and diverse city-wide campaign **uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members**. We advocate as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color as *"We Are Building A Community Too Powerful To Ignore."*

Korean Community Services has served the Korean immigrant and Korean American communities in New York City for fifty years. Our organization began as a hub for new Korean immigrants to find stability in their new lives in New York City. More recently, our work has diversified not only in our services offered but in the communities we serve. A key component of our programming is our Older Adult Centers, whose work aims to provide older adults with resources, classes, meals and a sense of community and belonging. The work our Older Adult Centers, located in Flushing and Corona, could not be achieved if not for proper funding, our dedicated staff, and the support of our various coalitions and community-based organization partners.

We know our organization is not alone in the work it is dedicated to. There are countless other CBOs who dedicate their time and energy to the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities across the city. Whether they big new or tenured, large in scale or just breaking





Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

into their neighborhood, the work these institutions are committed to is invaluable to the health, wellbeing and security of their communities.

**Korean Community Services urges the New York City Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$7.5 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4 million, among other key city-wide initiatives** to take further steps in not envisioning, but truly creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora .

Thank you very much for your time.



# Lincoln Center

**Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.  
FY24 Preliminary Budget Testimony  
March 14, 2023**

Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on Aging,

Thank you for accepting testimony today to address the critical need for city investments for our older adults through culture and the arts.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, one of the 34 members of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), is an artistic and civic cornerstone for New York City, with the purpose of cultivating, fostering, and centering socially-engaged arts programs within civic daily life. Lincoln Center is home to 11 arts and arts education nonprofits, host to emerging and established artists, a civic partner to community-based organizations, and an iconic New York destination, making free and low-cost cultural programming accessible for all New Yorkers.

Culture and the arts are a powerful tool in supporting older adults aging in place here in New York City. Serving as both cultural and community hubs, cultural organizations are at the heart of this city nurturing the mind, body, and soul of all that live here, especially older adults seeking connection, reflection, and healing.

Lincoln Center Moments, our performance-based program specifically for older adults with dementia and their caregivers, is proof of this work. Since its inception in 2016, the program brings Lincoln Center's unparalleled artistry to an intimate and supportive setting to address the needs of the rapidly growing population affected by dementia. Now offering 26 free performances and interactive arts-based activities each year, the program provides meaningful connection to the arts and community for an audience that may be unable to attend mainstream performances.

Annually the program serves more than 1,000 participants, with 646 participants welcomed for our latest fall 2022 season. In Summer 2020, in response to the pandemic we introduced virtual performances, allowing the program to reach participants who are not able to travel to Lincoln Center due to disability, disease progression, or access to transportation. Additionally, this past fall we added morning sessions with relaxed performances, designed for a neurodiverse audience and open to adults with developmental disabilities. Lincoln Center is committed to continuing the program in both virtual and in-person settings to allow the most people possible to participate.

In reflection of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts' mission of accessibility and inclusion, we are further expanding accessibility for older adults attending free and public performances across Lincoln Center's stages. All Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts performances offer live captioning and American Sign Language interpretation for people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing, audio description for people who are blind or have low vision, and adapted movement-based programs for older adults with limited mobility. Additionally, we have partnered with the New York City Department for the Aging to promote Moments and discounts to performances year-round for older adults, and senior-serving community-based organizations locally. Thank you, Chair Hudson, for your continued support helping connect older adults in your district with Lincoln Center programs. We are always looking for additional partnerships and would love to work with members of the committee to connect Older Adult Centers and community organizations in your district with our cultural programming.

City support remains vital for free programming like Lincoln Center Moments to remain accessible for our City's growing population of older adults and those affected by dementia. Maintaining funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and supporting initiative and member items allows the cultural sector to work with and for New Yorkers in ways that

would otherwise be impossible. Culture has the data-proven ability to strengthen communities, improve education outcomes, promote community safety, and improve the mental health and well-being of neighborhoods.

**As the Council determines its budget priorities for FY24, we are here to ask for the continued investment of Council Initiatives**, including Autism Awareness, Geriatric Mental Health, Arts as a Catalyst for Change, CASA, and SU-CASA, which allow cultural organizations like Lincoln Center to deliver arts experiences directly to New Yorkers.

**A few anecdotes from Lincoln Center Moments participants:**

*I did not want to leave the zoom at the end of the session. I felt so touched that I got a little emotional. All the dancers were dancing beyond their boundaries, which were amazing. Their movements and coordination were extraordinary and outstanding. The art workshop was so much fun. I have never done anything in clay. I greatly appreciate all of you putting together this wonderful program for caregivers and Alzheimer's disease/dementia individuals which is beneficiary and helpful.*

*My mother was a musician and it's amazing to watch her soul come to life again when she hears music. So thankful for these moments you help create!*

*The energy was great. Upbeat. Forgot all your troubles at the moment. Helped a lot.*

**The cultural community respectfully requests that the \$40M added at Adoption in FY23 be restored and baselined. We request an additional \$10M, to be split evenly between the CIG and our program group partners, to help create more stability and equity within the sector.**

City funding allows the cultural sector to fulfill its role within a healthy democracy as spaces for convening, learning, healing, supporting, and uplifting all New Yorkers across every neighborhood district regardless of race, age, ability, creed, gender, or socioeconomic status. Culture was critical to our city's recovery from the pandemic. At no time has investment in the arts been more critical for the well-being of our city.

I thank the members of this Committee, and the City at large, for the ongoing partnership in arts and culture and education and urge you to consider supporting cultural institutions as key players in service of our city's families, students, and seniors.

Thank you again for your continued leadership. Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts is committed to New York City as a place where everyone is welcome and where they belong, and we continue to engage as lifelong learners to do better as a world-class arts, education, and civic hub for all.

We look forward to being in dialogue with the Council and the Administration about this request in detail.

Please email me at [edesiervo@lincolncenter.org](mailto:edesiervo@lincolncenter.org) if you have questions or would like to hear more about Lincoln Center's plans.

Respectfully submitted,

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**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on Fiscal  
Year 2022 Preliminary Budget**

PRESENTED BEFORE:

NEW YORK CITY COUNSEL

SUBMITTED BY:

CAROLINE ROE  
SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY  
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.

March 15, 2023

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**MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.**

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## **I. Introduction**

Mobilization for Justice, Inc. (MFJ) envisions a society in which there is equal justice for all. Our Mission is to achieve justice for all. MFJ prioritizes the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised, or have disabilities as they struggle to overcome the effects of social injustice and systemic racism. We provide the highest-quality free, direct civil legal assistance, conduct community education and build partnerships, engage in policy advocacy, and bring impact litigation. MFJ also promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion in our workplace, and understands the need to eliminate all racial disparities to achieve justice for all. MFJ assists more than 24,000 New Yorkers each year.

MFJ's Kinship Caregiver Law Project (KCLP) helps stabilize families by providing civil legal assistance to caregivers raising children who are not their biological sons or daughters. Thousands of grandparents, other relatives, and fictive kin take care of children whose birth parents are deceased, incarcerated or are otherwise unable or unwilling to provide a stable home. MFJ works to prevent these children from entering the traditional foster care system by representing caregivers in custody guardianship, and adoption proceedings. MFJ's Kinship Caregiver Law Project is the only program in the City serving the legal needs of kinship caregivers.

MFJ appreciates the opportunity to share with the Committee on Aging information about free legal assistance MFJ provides to the kinship caregiver community to ensure family stability for some of the City's most vulnerable and at-risk children and families.

## **II. Racial Disparities Exist in Both the Family Court System and the Administration for Children's Services**

KCLP's representation of Kincare providers for nonwhite families, particularly Black and Latinx families, who face racial disparities in both the court system and in dealings the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and in the court system. Indeed, black families are seven times more likely than white families to be reported to ACS and thirteen times more likely to have their children removed.<sup>1</sup>

These interferences are made even worse by the fact that two-thirds of all ACS allegations are based solely on neglect.<sup>2</sup> Neglect allegations include concerns about inadequate food, shelter, medical care, clothing, and childcare, all of which can be linked to poverty.<sup>3</sup> Although ACS does not track socio-economic data for families, nationwide, families under the poverty line are 22 times more likely to be involved with child protective service. Interactions with ACS

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nyclu.org/en/news/even-child-welfare-workers-say-their-agency-racist-0>

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

are traumatic for both children and their parents.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, trauma suffered in foster care can be so severe that it can cause long-term effects on a child's physical and mental development.<sup>5</sup>

These traumas can be exacerbated by the court system, which has been shown to have its own issues with racial bias. Following the protests against the police murder of George Floyd, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore commissioned a review of the New York City Court system.<sup>6</sup> While the review condemned the entire court system, the results were particularly grim for the Family Courts.<sup>7</sup> The review indicated that racial discrimination in all levels of the court, with several litigants experiencing cruel and indifferent treatment from judges and other court staff.

In its practice, KCLP has a unique opportunity to address some of this discrimination. First, by assisting and representing black and brown Kincare providers, KCLP helps families remain unified, even in the face of a removal proceeding. Moreover, the close familiar bonds already developed by children and Kincare providers, allow children in removal proceedings to maintain some level of stability during an otherwise unstable time. This sense of stability can be crucial in combatting the adverse effects caused by a removal proceeding.

KCLP's work can also address some of the racial disparities experienced in Family Court, even in cases that do not involve ACS. Court can be confusing and dehumanizing for all litigants, but particularly those who are *pro se*. By representing Kincare providers, KCLP is able to clear up some of this confusion, allowing for more predictability and stability for families in need of court intervention. Although KCLP's is just a small step in protecting litigants, its importance is particularly salient in light of the court system's recent review.

### **III. Support Legal Services for Kinship Caregivers**

#### **a. Lack of Right to Counsel**

Grandparents, siblings, and extended family members regularly provide the daily care and support of children whose parents are unable to do so. Despite this, kinship caregivers are not provided with an attorney or invited to court proceedings to determine the child's placement in the event that the child is removed from their parent's care.

MFJ regularly receives calls from prospective caregivers who know that a child they love has entered the foster care system, but they are unable to get the child into their care. In cases like this, caregivers are deeply concerned for these children, but are unable to get any information about bringing these children into their homes. Many of these callers are unfamiliar with either the foster care system or the family court system and are unable to afford an attorney to assist them. Moreover, there are few legal resources for these individuals. In fact, MFJ is the only provider in New York City which offers free legal representation to individuals in this population.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nyclu.org/en/news/how-so-called-child-welfare-system-hurts-families>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/litigation\\_committees/childrights/child-separation-memo/parent-child-separation-trauma-memo.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/litigation_committees/childrights/child-separation-memo/parent-child-separation-trauma-memo.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://gothamist.com/news/nys-courts-are-rife-racism-second-class-system-justice-people-color>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nycourts.gov/whatsnew/pdf/SpecialAdviserEqualJusticeReport.pdf>

Section 262 of the Family Court Act specifies who is entitled to assigned counsel and for what proceedings. In case of abuse and neglect, parents, subject children, and the ACS are all entitled to counsel; however, family members or friends who would like to care for the child are not entitled to an attorney and are often excluded from court proceedings. Additionally, these family members and friends are often restricted from having the child due to non-safety factors such as income, number of bedrooms in home, or non-violent criminal or prior ACS history.<sup>8</sup>

These restrictions exist contrary to all evidence regarding kinship care. There is strong evidence to show that kinship care is far more beneficial to the children and families in foster care. These benefits include improved academic performance, lower incidence of mental illness, lower teen pregnancy rates, and improved self-esteem for foster children.

Despite these obvious benefits, there are few options for New York City families facing child removal proceedings. These caregivers are forced to navigate the family court system alone, without access to legal advice or guidance. This process can be confusing, as caregivers must figure out how to file petitions, service, and legal advocacy without the benefit of an attorney. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that all the other litigants in these proceedings – parents, ACS, and the subject children, are represented by counsel.

MFJ's KCLP unit helps fill these gaps and allows caregivers to access legal representation and advice during these difficult times. Funding from the Speaker Initiative awarded to MFJ during 2021 and 2022 helped serve hundreds of families facing these challenges, the vast majority of whom are low-income BIPOC women.

b. Mobilization for Justice is the Only Program in New York City Assisting with Kinship Caregivers with their Legal Needs

As stated earlier, MFJ is currently the only legal provider in the City who provides free legal representation to kinship caregivers. Although MFJ offers legal advice on a wide array of issues, the following 5 areas are the most common:

**Adoption** – MFJ assists caregivers who, in most cases, have been abandoned by their biological parents or left in their caregiver's care for an extended period. Adoption awards the caregiver permanent, parental rights.

**Access to Public Benefits** – Most, if not all, of MFJ's clients live at or near the poverty level. Under federal guidelines, the amounts to an annual income of less than \$30,000 for a family of four.<sup>9</sup> The costs of caring for one or more additional children with such limited funds places an enormous financial burden on our clients. Kinship caregivers who are denied foster parent certification, may apply for a special "non-parent" cash assistance grant, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Child-Only grant.<sup>10</sup> This grant is significantly less than a foster care subsidy. When foster parent certification is not an option, MFJ advises

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<sup>8</sup> <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/kinship/background-and-process.php>

<sup>9</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/temporary-assistance-needy-families-tanf>

caregivers on eligibility for the “non-parent” cash grant and assists troubleshooting when families are denied this benefit .

**Custody & Guardianship** – Many of MFJ’s clientele have no established legal relationship to the child in their care. Instead, many of these caretakers reach out to MFJ after the crisis has occurred. Without any legal order, caregivers are unable to make significant medical or psychiatric decisions; request a child’s birth certificate; request a child’s social security card; obtain a passport for the child; add a child to household composition/lease for subsidized housing; or make decisions or provide input regarding education, including special education needs and disciplinary/suspension issues. MFJ helps caregivers to establish legal rights to protect the child’s best interests by helping families receive orders or custody and guardianship, which allow them to have full legal authority to protect the child’s best interests.

**Special Immigration Juvenile Status** – Many of our kinship families are also in need of immigration relief, including Special Immigration Juvenile Status, a remedy available in Juvenile Court Proceedings to address the needs of undocumented children who cannot be returned to their parents. Today, as an integral part of its family stabilization effort, MFJ assists in caregiving families in obtaining adjustments of status, work authorizations, and lawful permanent residence for qualified children who otherwise would be at risk of deportation. Pathways to legal immigration status improve long-term educational and financial outcomes for children, enabling children to become eligible for financial aid to pursue higher education.

**Visitation** – Maintaining kinship ties creates a sense of stability for children. MFJ advises grandparents who have been separated from their grandchildren when their own children have died, are the victims of domestic violence or when the children have been placed in the homes of unrelated foster parents. MFJ is also available to help siblings enforce their right to visit brothers and sisters.

**Foster Care Advocacy** – As noted above, kinship caregivers denied foster parent certification do not receive the full range of available supportive services – including the foster care subsidy- and instead are only eligible to apply for the TANF Child Only grant. MFJ advocates for kinship caregivers to be a placement resource when there is a child in traditional or non-kin foster care.

c. Supporting Accessibility and Partnerships to Maximize Resources Available to Kinship Caregivers

MFJ collaborates with social services organizations, community groups, and other advocates to provide holistic services to kinship caregivers. Prior to the pandemic, clients accessed MFJ’s services through a walk-in clinic at the Bronx Family Court, a telephone hotline, and “know-your-rights” trainings that MFJ conducts around New York City. Today, clients continue to be served through existing community-based partnerships and organizations and our telephone hotline and in person clinicsMFJ’s attorneys chair the New York City Kincare Task Force and are leaders within the New York State Kincare Coalition. MFJ attorneys educate the legal community about caregiver needs by providing continuing legal education

programs for advocates, courthouse staff, and pro bono attorneys. MFJ engages in legislative advocacy to promote the interests of caregivers and their families. Attorneys from the Kinship Caregiver Law Project also coordinate with MFJ's other projects to assist caregivers with consumer, tax, foreclosure prevention, housing, education, and other needs.

#### **IV. Kinship Caregiving in a Pandemic**

##### **a. In the Wake of COVID-19 and the Ongoing Pandemic, the Need for Kinship Caregiving has Increased**

While it is always difficult for a child to lose a parent, it can be particularly confusing when the parent passes due to Covid-19.<sup>11</sup> These problems are especially compounded when the surviving children are low income, a part of a racial minority, and who have no surviving parent or guardian.<sup>12</sup>

During the peak, Covid-19 killed approximately 600 New York City residents a day.<sup>13</sup> Across the state, the daily losses were closer to 1000 people a day.<sup>14</sup> Although these numbers have gone down with the widespread availability of Covid-19 vaccinations, surviving family members still suffer the devastating health, financial, and psychological trauma connected with losing a family member to Covid-19. These issues are particularly prevalent for Black and Hispanic communities, which faced the highest numbers of death and hospitalizations for Covid-19.<sup>15</sup>

Children who lost a parent due to Covid-19 are at high risk of entry into the foster care system. According to a study conducted by the United Hospital Fund (UHF) and the Boston Consulting Group found that up to 23% of children who had lost a parent or caregiver due to Covid-19 “may be at risk of entry into foster or kinship care” and that “approximately 50% of children who lost a caregiver due to Covid-19 may enter poverty.”

During the pandemic, the upended court system made it even more difficult for effected families to formalize care for children who have lost parents due to Covid-19. Although the court can be confusing at the best of times, this was especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic, when courts were forced to close, leaving affected children in legal limbo.

One such case was that of Ms. B, who sought legal guardianship over her goddaughter, T. As a baby, T had been removed from her mother's care and placed with Ms. B's sister. Sadly, in January 2021, Ms. B's sister passed away due to complications related to Covid-19. Upon the death of Ms. B's sister, T was left without anyone to care or make decisions for her. Ms. B did not want T to return to the foster care system, and in an effort to avoid this outcome, Ms. B reached out to MFJ regarding representation for a guardianship proceeding.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/youngest-mourners-these-are-childrenwho-have-lost-parent-covid-n1254683>

<sup>12</sup> Id.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data-totals.page>

<sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> <https://covidtracking.com/data/state/new-york/race-ethnicity>



With the assistance of attorneys, Ms. B was able to file a guardianship case in Family Court, working with ACS and T's mother to ensure that T is able live with Ms. B. By assisting T and Ms. B, MFJ was able to help ensure that T remains with a family who loves her and will care for her, which is particularly crucial during the difficult time in the family's life.

Although the courts have reopened, the instability and devastation continues to unsettle the lives of children who have lost parents and caregivers due to Covid-19. Given these ramifications, it is more important than ever that Kinship caregivers are empowered to provide these children with the love and stability needed to grow and thrive.

## **V. Conclusion**

Kinship caregivers allow children to remain with loved ones during a time when their homes and families are in turmoil. Caregivers often play an important role in the lives of children and should be offered the opportunity express their love and concern in matters of custody, guardianship, adoption, and Article 10 proceedings. This representation is particularly considering that Kincare providers are often the most stable option in family court proceedings.

MFJ's holistic approach to Kincare ensures that both children and caregivers are given access to legal protections and financial assistance that can help these families avoid financial instability and heartache during crises. MFJ respectfully submits this testimony in an effort to ensure that KCLP can continue to protect these litigants.



Making New York a better place to age

New York City Council

Committee on Aging

Chair, Council Member Hudson

March 14, 2023

**Oversight - Preliminary Budget Hearing - Aging**

My name is Brianna Paden-Williams and I am the Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LiveOn NY's members include more than 110 community-based nonprofits that provide core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our communities as we age, including older adult centers, home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, elder abuse prevention, caregiver support, NORCs, and case management. With our members, we work to make New York a better place to age.

**Background**

Aging services are essential services with over 1.8 million older adults 60 and over living in New York City. Yet older adults have not been prioritized by the City, despite an essential human services workforce administering critical services that provide the necessary support for older adults to age in community. Over the past year, community-based organizations have been faced with significant inflationary costs for raw food, gas and items, coupled with a growing waitlist for aging services that does not have the equitable funding from the City to meet the growing demand for community services to support older adults.

The lack of prioritization is evident in the FY24 Preliminary Budget with Mayor Adams including a \$25 million cut to the NYC Aging (also known as Department for the Aging), despite the increased demand for aging services. As we all grow older, ensuring that we can all age in community with access to services regardless of one's zip code or background should be a priority for the City.

**Rather than cuts, it's time to invest in older New Yorkers and for the City to pay the human services workforce a just and equitable wage.** It's time for the City to enact a more equitable budget that holistically supports these professionals that work tirelessly to ensure that no older New Yorker falls through the cracks.

Given this, the following investments are critical to building a truly equitable City for all ages.

**Critical Investments in NYC Aging (also known as the Department for the Aging or DFTA) Services**

***Support the Workforce***



Making New York a better place to age

**The City must just pay all essential human service workers a liveable and equitable wage.**

Poverty level government contracts have left human services workers severely underpaid for years. This workforce that is composed mainly of women and people of people have kept New York City afloat throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the wages of these workers have remained stagnant despite the rising cost of living in New York City. While last year's budget included a \$60 million baseline funding for human services workers, this does not fully address the pay and gender inequity that is crippling our City.

As a result organizations are faced with increased staff turnover as underpaid staff leave nonprofits for better paying jobs in other sectors, depriving New Yorkers of services from the most experienced, well-trained staff and jeopardizing high-quality services. It is essential for the human services providers to have sustainable funding to meet the needs of our communities while also having sufficient wages for ourselves and families. To address this crisis, the City must implement changes that address the inequitable pay of human services workers. **LiveOn NY recommends the City establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5% automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on all human services contracts.**

***Combat Hunger***

**LiveOn NY requests \$64.8 million in additional funding to combat hunger among older adults including:**

This investment would include an additional \$14 million to address the inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for home-delivered meals as well as \$46 million for inflation cost for congregate meals in Older Adult Centers. LiveOn NY found in a recent study that our member organizations have experienced an average 27% increase in the cost per meal compared to last year due to significant inflationary cost. For some organizations, they have run out of money in their contracts to continue to sustain the capacity of the community-services including home-delivered meals and congregate meals. The inflationary cost to provide meals to older adults has put a financial strain on many providers over the past year forcing many providers to reckon with uncertainty of being able to sustain in the future.

Additionally, LiveOn NY is requesting an additional \$567,000 to address the DFTA's home-delivered meal waitlist. Furthermore, this investment would provide \$4 million to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals which are not provided through current contracts, and did not receive the same investment to address reimbursement rate as weekday meals received.

***Promote Community Care***



Making New York a better place to age

**Allocate an additional \$29.4 million to address the unmet needs of older adults through Aging NYC funded services including:**

- An additional \$7.5 million investment to expand digital literacy programming including devices to facilitate virtual programming for older adults as well as expand technology programming accessibility and to support technology expansion
- \$1.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the case management program to ensure all clients can be screened and receive this critical service should they be eligible. Exacerbated by the long-term health impacts of isolation and other stressors experienced during COVID, many older adults will require some level of case management to remain independent in their communities. In a recent survey, LiveOn NY estimated that more than 1,300 clients are currently on waiting lists for case management. This comes on top of consistent demand increases for case management that have historically led to waiting lists, requiring additional funding each year, and indicating a need for early and significant investments to avoid the continued cycle of recurring waiting lists.
- \$15.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the home care program, including expanding the hours of home care service available to older adults requiring additional support.
- \$5 million to support communications and marketing outreach for NYC Aging funded programming for community-based organization outreach to older adults

### *Address the Housing Crisis*

**Allocate funding to develop 1,000 units of affordable senior housing with services per year.**

LiveOn NY joins the United for Housing Coalition in calling for a \$4 billion annual investment to fund a comprehensive affordable housing plan that must include a minimum target of 1,000 new units of affordable senior housing with services per year, as part of a total target to construct no fewer than 8,000 new units of housing dedicated to serving extremely low income and homeless households annually. As waitlists and limited housing stock pose an acute challenge for older New Yorkers, a considerable investment and consistent unit targets per year will be critical to paving a pathway out of this crisis.

This investment would build upon the clear success of the City's Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) program, which has created community assets in every borough, including examples such as WSFSSH's Tres Puentes in the Bronx and HANAC's Corona Senior Residences in Queens. These two building are examples of what is possible through housing, with Tres Puentes not only offering 175 new units of affordable senior housing, but providing space for a new Older Adult Center, health center and pharmacy on site, and the Corona



Making New York a better place to age

Residences offering 67 affordable senior units built to the environmentally friendly Passive Housing standards and a new Pre-K on the ground floor.

**LiveOn NY also recommends the City increase the per unit reimbursement rate for SARA services from \$5,000 per unit, to \$7,500 per unit, allowing for increased staff to more adequately address social isolation and significant case assistance needs.**

This increased reimbursement rate would make services better available to support an aging and formerly homeless tenant population, in turn enabling more older New Yorkers to age in place and avoid institutionalization.

### ***Support Local Needs***

**Fund an additional \$2.6 Million for Support our Seniors and continued full funding for all discretionary initiatives.**

Many programs, particularly smaller, hyper-local nonprofits that serve hard-to-reach senior populations rely on discretionary funding to ensure their communities can be served. Therefore, it is critical that all aging services discretionary are fully funded in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget.

In addition, LiveOn NY is requesting an additional \$2.6 million for the Support Our Senior Initiative that would provide an additional \$50,00 per district on average to better support older New Yorkers, in particular for services or programs including transportation, social isolation, technology and more.

### **Conclusion**

To truly make New York a better place to age, where we can all thrive in community, we must build a caring economy that supports all older New Yorkers regardless of their background. From a livable and competitive wage for *all* human services workers to equitable policies and programs that support all New Yorkers, New York can become a more equitable place to age.

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

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*LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to*



Making New York a better place to age

*improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.*

*LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.*

# FY24 Advocate for Aging

Over 1.8 million older adults age 60 and over live in New York City. Yet older adults and the human services workforce that provide critical aging services have not been prioritized by the City. The lack of investment is evident in the FY24 Preliminary Budget released by Mayor Adams including a \$25 million cut to NYC Aging (formerly known as Department for the Aging), despite the increased demand for aging services. Older New Yorkers and the human services sector need investments not cuts. As we all grow older, we deserve to age in community with access to equitable services regardless of one's zip code or background. Let's #AdvocateforAgingNYC to show the City that aging services have been and will always be essential for all New Yorkers!



## #JustPay human services workers

- Establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on all human services contracts.



## \$64.8 Million to Combat Older Adult Hunger

- \$14 million for inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for home-delivered meals
- \$46 million for inflation cost for raw food, gas and other items for congregate meals
- \$567,000 to address the DFTA's home-delivered meal waitlist
- \$4 million to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals not provided through NYC Aging



## \$29.4 Million to Address the Unmet Needs of Older Adults (NYC Aging funded services)

- \$1.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the case management program
- \$15.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the home care program,
- \$7.5 million for digital literacy and devices to facilitate virtual programming for Older Adults. In addition, to expand technology programming accessibility and to support technology expansion
- \$5 million to support communications and marketing outreach for DFTA funded programming for community-based organization outreach to older adults



## Invest in Affordable Housing

- Allocate funding to develop 1,000 units of affordable senior housing per year.
- Increase the per unit reimbursement rate for SARA services from \$5,000 per unit, to \$7,500 per unit, allowing for increased staff to more adequately address social isolation and significant case assistance needs.



Photo Courtesy of Selfhelp Community Services

Photo Courtesy of LiveOn NY



Photo Courtesy of the William Hodson Senior Center

# Full Funding for All Aging Related Discretionary Initiatives



## Support Our Seniors

**Restore  
\$7,140,000**

Supporting aging services programs in every district

**Add an additional  
\$2,600,000**

This would provide \$50,000 per district on average to better support older New Yorkers, particularly given the needs, such as transportation, social isolation, technology, and others, experienced during COVID-19

***This would bring total Support Our Seniors funding to: \$9.74 million***

## NORCs



**Restore  
\$6,400,000**

Support NORCs throughout the City, including funding for on-site nursing services.



**\$3,405,000 for  
Geriatric Mental  
Health Initiative**

Expand mental health services for older adults



**\$2,000,000 for  
Case Management**

Support case management services for older adults



**\$4,376,000 for Older  
Adult Centers and  
Programs and  
Enhancements**

Support for older adult centers, meals, homecare, transportation, and other senior services programs



**\$3,300,000  
for SU-CASA**

Support community arts initiative serving older adults

***Plus full funding for all initiatives that support older New Yorkers, including:  
Immigrant Senior Centers, LGBTQ+ Community Services, Social Adult Day Care, Elder Abuse Prevention,  
Borough Presidents' Discretionary Funding Restoration, and Information and Referral Services***

## Questions?

Brianna Paden-Williams, LiveOn NY, [bpaden-williams@liveon-ny.org](mailto:bpaden-williams@liveon-ny.org)  
Tara Klein, United Neighborhood Houses, [tklein@unhny.org](mailto:tklein@unhny.org)  
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**New York City Council Committee on Aging  
Tuesday, March 16, 2022  
Committee on Aging- Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs**

Good afternoon, my name is Sherrise Palomino, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We are a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes over 400 organizations from across the five boroughs. Thank you to the Committee on Aging for the opportunity to speak about the value of our city's parks and recreation centers on seniors. I also want to thank Chair Crystal Hudson for her leadership. Members of this committee have a unique opportunity to push for adequate funding for our parks systems as it is a meaningful component of supporting NYC seniors.

The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that older adults get 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week. Our parks and recreation centers mean health equity access for seniors. Parks are critical infrastructure that should be a driver of social equity. Many nonprofit partners offer free programming and social services to seniors in parks and recreation centers.

The NYC Parks Department operates and maintains 59 recreation centers across the city to serve a population of over 1.1 million seniors. Of the 59 community board districts, 26 don't have a NYC Parks recreation center. These recreation centers provide critical opportunities for senior's physical and mental health and space for seniors to socialize and be valued. While NYC's recreation centers are essential to seniors' overall well-being and longevity; they are also chronically understaffed and badly in need of repairs, with roughly one third of them closed at any given time.

We are overdue for transformative investment in our parks system – 1% of the city budget for parks could ensure that recreation centers are fully staffed and functioning to provide the programming that seniors and families alike need. This is one of the many reasons why NY4P and the Play Fair Coalition are calling for an increase in the Parks budget to 1% of the city's budget.

*For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. [www.ny4p.org](http://www.ny4p.org)*



## **Testimony for the NYC Council 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearings**

### **NYC Council Committee on Aging**

**Crystal Hudson (Chair), Christopher Marte, Kristin Richardson Jordan, Eric Dinowitz, Linda Lee, Lynn Schulman, and Darlene Mealy**

**March 14, 2023**

### **Kimberly George, President and CEO, Project Guardianship**

Thank you, Chair Hudson and Committee Members, for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Kimberly George, and I am President and CEO of Project Guardianship, a spinoff program of the Vera Institute of Justice and a non-profit organization providing comprehensive, person-centered, court appointed adult guardianship services to hundreds of limited capacity New Yorkers citywide. Our clients are living with disability, dementia, serious mental illness, substance misuse, Traumatic Brain Injury, and other conditions that negatively impact their ability to manage their affairs. We serve clients regardless of their ability to pay and provide services for some of the most compelling and complex cases in the city. We also share research and policy recommendations for a better guardianship system and advocate for more equitable service provision for people in need of surrogate decision-making supports or protective arrangements.

As I'm sure this committee knows, as per 2019 data, there were 1.1 million older adults in New York City, making up 13% of the population<sup>1</sup>. Mirroring national demographics, New York City's older adult population is also growing larger, living longer, and getting poorer<sup>2</sup>. In fact, one in five older New Yorkers lives below the poverty level, and older adults who identify as Latino (27%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (26%) are more likely to live below the poverty level compared with those who identify as Black (19%) or White (17%)<sup>3</sup>. Further, almost a third (32%) of older New Yorkers live alone, without family to rely on to provide ongoing support or help during crises. The likelihood of living alone increases with age and is highest among Latino (30%) and Black older adults (34%)<sup>4</sup>. Conservative estimates suggest that more than half of the older adult population will need some type of long-term care services<sup>5</sup>, including adult guardianship to facilitate access to that care. As this population grows, so will the demand for guardians that can protect and promote their interests.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.voa-gny.org/aging-new-yorkers#:~:text=Mirroring%20national%20demographics%2C%20New%20York,into%20poverty%20and%20oftentimes%20homelessness.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/2019-older-adult-health.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-edit-long-term-care-crisis-20200126-l7ep4h3l3bhjnm3mih7xx7xnu-story.html>





New York State is fortunate to have strong legal protections that entitle individuals access to guardianship services. The law provides that, when an individual has been adjudicated to need a guardian to manage their personal and/or property needs, they shall be appointed one. However, we do not have a statewide public guardian entity, nor do we invest in guardianship services at a level that can meet current or future demand. Currently, a patchwork of non-profit providers and pro-bono attorneys provide services when a family member, friend or private-pay guardian is not an option. But this network is already stretched to capacity, leaving thousands without these vital supports.

Guardianship has one function: to protect the safety, well-being, dignity, and assets of those individuals the courts have found to be incapacitated. Our services are comprehensive and multidisciplinary, often encompassing civil legal services, financial management and healthcare coordination, among other tasks to promote the health and stability of the individual. An effective guardian, and in some cases an interdisciplinary guardianship team, works to prevent institutionalization and support these populations right in their own communities. Not only do these efforts stimulate the local economy by redirecting this funding back into the community, guardianship also saves public dollars by decreasing unnecessary Medicaid spending on avoidable hospitalizations or higher levels of care provided in nursing homes or similar skilled settings.

We have and will continue to fill the gaps in our social safety net and will persist in connecting our clients to the housing, health and mental health care, legal and immigration services, and public benefits they need and deserve to gain stability and age with dignity. But we will need additional funding to adequately meet the needs of these clients in the most person-centered, least restrictive way possible. New York City must lead and create a dedicated funding stream to support guardians that provide care for older, limited capacity adults and individuals with disabilities. In doing so, more New Yorkers in need will be able to access the benefits and services to which they are entitled so they may thrive as they age, ideally in community. With the rapid expansion of our older adult population, the dramatic increase in older adults living in poverty, and the recent rise in Alzheimer's diagnoses and mental health needs, the time to act is now.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

Please contact Kimberly George at [kgeorge@nycourts.gov](mailto:kgeorge@nycourts.gov) with any questions or requests for additional information.



**New York City Council  
Committee on Aging  
Chair, Council Member Hudson  
March 14, 2023  
Oversight - Preliminary Budget Hearing - Aging**

This testimony is submitted by Julie Dalton, Executive Director of Riverdale Senior Services (RSS). Thank you for considering this testimony in relation to the FY 24 Preliminary Budget hearing. Thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the Aging Committee, for your commitment and thoughtful leadership as we strive to make New York City age-friendly. It is so important to recognize the effects of ageism and the impact of inadequate resources for the aging services provider network.

Riverdale Senior Services (RSS), has a 49-year history serving older adults and their families in the Northwest Bronx. Our mission is to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional well-being of older adults enabling them to live and thrive in the community. RSS does this through a comprehensive array of holistic programs and services that take place at our center, at community locations and virtually through a wide array of classes and support groups. Our philosophic approach - RSS is here in whatever way older adults prefer: at our Older Adults Center, at community locations where older adults gather, or online.

RSS offers vital resources that support aging-in-place employing an integrated service delivery model and embracing community involvement. RSS is an experienced provider in the NYC Aging network. RSS programs include an Older Adult Center, a Social Adult Day Program, Health Promotion/Management Services, Transportation Services, Geriatric Mental Health Services, Intergenerational Programs, a Chronic Disease Prevention Program and a Healthy Communities Project. We offer a wide array of educational and recreational programs as well as programs specific for those with cognitive impairment. Serving over 1500 older adults in the Northwest Bronx annually, RSS meets people where they are, by providing virtual program options and bringing our services to where older adults gather, such as housing complexes and faith communities.

## **Background**

Aging services are essential services with over 1.8 million older adults 60 and over living in New York City. Yet older adults have not been prioritized by the City, despite an essential human services workforce administering critical services that provide the necessary support for older adults to age in community. Over the past year, community-based organizations have been faced with significant inflationary costs for

raw food, gas and items, coupled with a growing waitlist for aging services that does not have the equitable funding from the City to meet the growing demand for community services to support older adults.

The lack of prioritization is evident in the FY24 Preliminary Budget with Mayor Adams including a \$25 million cut to the NYC Aging (also known as Department for the Aging), despite the increased demand for aging services. As we all grow older, ensuring that we can all age in community with access to services regardless of one's zip code or background should be a priority for the City.

**Rather than cuts, it's time to invest in older New Yorkers and for the City to pay the human services workforce a just and equitable wage.** It's time for the City to enact a more equitable budget that holistically supports these professionals that work tirelessly to ensure that no older New Yorker falls through the cracks.

Given this, the following investments are critical to building a truly equitable City for all ages.

### **Critical Investments in NYC Aging (also known as the Department for the Aging or DFTA) Services**

#### *Support the Workforce*

**The City must pay all essential human service workers a livable and equitable wage.**

Poverty level government contracts have left human services workers severely underpaid for years. This workforce that is composed mainly of women and people of color have kept New York City afloat throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the wages of these workers have remained stagnant despite the rising cost of living in New York City. While last year's budget included a \$60 million baseline funding for human services workers, this does not fully address the pay and gender inequity that is crippling our City.

As a result, organizations are faced with increased staff turnover as underpaid staff leave nonprofits for better paying jobs in other sectors, depriving New Yorkers of services from the most experienced, well-trained staff and jeopardizing high-quality services. It is essential for the human services providers to have sustainable funding to meet the needs of our communities while also having sufficient wages for ourselves and families. To address this crisis, the City must implement changes that address the inequitable pay of human services workers. **RSS recommends the City establish, fund, and enforce a 6.5% automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) on all human services contracts.**

#### *Combat Hunger*

**\$64.8 million in additional funding to combat hunger among older adults is a necessary investment.**

This investment would include an additional \$14 million to address the inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for home-delivered meals as well as \$46 million for inflation cost for congregate meals in Older Adult Centers. RSS, a LiveOn NY member, participated in a recent study regarding meal costs. The study demonstrated that LiveOn NY member organizations have experienced an average 27% increase in the cost per meal compared to last year due to significant inflationary cost. For some organizations, they have run out of money in their contracts to continue to sustain the capacity of the community-services including home-delivered meals and congregate meals. The inflationary cost to provide meals to older adults has put a financial strain on many providers over the past year forcing many providers to reckon with uncertainty of being able to sustain in the future.

Additionally, RSS supports an additional \$567,000 to address NYC Aging's home-delivered meal waitlist. Furthermore, this investment would provide \$4 million to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals which are not provided through current contracts, and did not receive the same investment to address reimbursement rate as weekday meals received.

### *Promote Community Care*

**Allocate an additional \$29.4 million to address the unmet needs of older adults through Aging NYC funded services including:**

- An additional \$7.5 million investment to expand digital literacy programming including devices to facilitate virtual programming for older adults as well as expand technology programming accessibility and to support technology expansion.
- \$1.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the case management program to ensure all clients can be screened and receive this critical service should they be eligible. Exacerbated by the long-term health impacts of isolation and other stressors experienced during COVID, many older adults will require some level of case management to remain independent in their communities. In a recent survey, LiveOn NY estimated that more than 1,300 clients are currently on waiting lists for case management. This comes on top of consistent demand increases for case management that have historically led to waiting lists, requiring additional funding each year, and indicating a need for early and significant investments to avoid the continued cycle of recurring waiting lists.
- \$15.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the home care program, including expanding the hours of home care service available to older adults requiring additional support.
- \$5 million to support communications and marketing outreach for NYC Aging funded programming for community-based organization outreach to older adults.

### *Address the Housing Crisis*

**Allocate funding to develop 1,000 units of affordable senior housing with services per year.**

RSS joins the United for Housing Coalition in calling for a \$4 billion annual investment to fund a comprehensive affordable housing plan that must include a minimum target of 1,000 new units of affordable senior housing with services per year, as part of a total target to construct no fewer than 8,000 new units of housing dedicated to serving extremely low income and homeless households annually. As waitlists and limited housing stock pose an acute challenge for older New Yorkers, a considerable investment and consistent unit targets per year will be critical to paving a pathway out of this crisis.

This investment would build upon the clear success of the City's Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) program, which has created community assets in every borough, including examples such as WSFSSH's Tres Puentes in the Bronx and HANAC's Corona Senior Residences in Queens. These two buildings are examples of what is possible through housing, with Tres Puentes not only offering 175 new units of affordable senior housing, but providing space for a new Older Adult Center, health center and pharmacy on site, and the Corona Residences offering 67 affordable senior units built to the environmentally friendly Passive Housing standards and a new Pre-K on the ground floor.

## **RSS also recommends the City increase the per unit reimbursement rate for SARA services**

Increasing the reimbursement rate from \$5,000 per unit, to \$7,500 per unit, allowing for increased staff to more adequately address social isolation and significant case assistance needs. This increased reimbursement rate would make services better available to support an aging and formerly homeless tenant population, in turn enabling more older New Yorkers to age in place and avoid institutionalization.

### ***Support Local Needs***

## **Fund an additional \$2.6 Million for Support our Seniors and continued full funding for all discretionary initiatives.**

Many programs, particularly smaller, hyper-local nonprofits that serve hard-to-reach senior populations rely on discretionary funding to ensure their communities can be served. Therefore, it is critical that all aging services discretionary are fully funded in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

In addition, RSS is requesting an additional \$2.6 million for the Support Our Senior Initiative that would provide an additional \$50,000 per district on average to better support older New Yorkers, in particular for services or programs including transportation, social isolation, technology and more.

## **Conclusion**

To truly make New York a better place to age, where we can all thrive in community, we must build a caring economy that supports all older New Yorkers regardless of their background. From a livable and competitive wage for *all* human services workers to equitable policies and programs that support all New Yorkers, New York can become a more equitable place to age.

**Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.**



**TESTIMONY**

New York City Council Committee on Aging  
FY24 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Delivered by:

MJ Okma

Senior Manager of Advocacy and Government Relations

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the New York City Council Committee on Aging. My name is MJ Okma and I am the Senior Manager of Advocacy and Government Relations at SAGE, the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ older people.

SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers for over four decades. With the support of the New York City Council, we provide comprehensive social services and community-building programs through our network LGBTQ+ older adult centers along with extensive virtual programming, and services for homebound LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV. SAGE also made history in 2020 and 2021 when, together with our developer partners, we opened New York's first LGBTQ+ welcoming elder housing developments located in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Services for older New Yorkers are more crucial than ever as the population of New Yorkers aged 60 and older is growing five times faster than those under 18, with LGBTQ+ elders making up a significant part of this rapidly growing older population.<sup>i</sup> In New York State, over one million adults identify as LGBTQ+ with a greater concentration in New York City compared to the rest of the state,<sup>ii</sup> and nearly one-third (28%) of LGBTQ+ adult New Yorkers are over the age of 50.<sup>iii</sup> Year after year, the population of LGBTQ+ older New Yorkers is only expected to grow as the population ages: by 2030, one in five New Yorkers will be over the age of 60.<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, 60% of New Yorkers living with HIV are over the age of 50.<sup>v</sup> In short, our City needs policies, initiatives, and programs to protect, effectively reach, and serve LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV.

Yet in this time of rapidly growing need, LGBTQ+ elders are often invisible, disconnected from services, and severely isolated without traditional biological familial supports. They are far more likely to live alone and less likely to rely on adult children or other family members for informal caregiving.<sup>vi</sup> In fact, 25% of SAGE's constituents have reported not having anyone else to call during an emergency. Because of these thin support networks, LGBTQ+ older people need to rely more heavily on community service providers for care as they age. Yet, they're



often distrustful of mainstream providers based on historical and ongoing discrimination and mistreatment.<sup>vii</sup> The services, community, and support system provided by SAGE are designed to address these gaps and serve as a lifeline for LGBTQ+ elders in New York City.

With the support of the New York City Council, SAGE operates a network of LGBTQ+ friendly older adult centers, called SAGE Centers, across NYC. SAGE Centers are a crucial access point for care and support for LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers who may need assistance. The SAGE Center network includes two brand new SAGE Centers located on the ground floor of our City's very first LGBTQ+ welcoming elder housing developments: SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House and SAGE Center Bronx at Crotona Pride House. These two developments with their co-located SAGE Centers help to alleviate poverty and improve housing security and overall health outcomes for New York City's low-income LGBTQ+ elders. Many of the LGBTQ+ elders who SAGE serves in these residences and through their co-located SAGE Centers struggle with mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness and require intensive care management and social service support. Because of this, there has been a higher demand for SAGE's care management services. SAGE is further responding to the needs of these community members by expanding multi-lingual programming and services in Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

SAGE Centers serve as a safety net for LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers and provide programming that reduces isolation; improves access to services; and offers benefits counseling, legal and financial planning, educational workshops, health and wellness programs, support groups, and nutritious meals. While core programming is implemented across all locations, each Center develops services that are unique to the culture, needs, and interests of the elders who attend that site. SAGE Centers also often co-produce programming, which builds meaningful connections and relationships between LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers across different boroughs and deepens elders' network of support.

These support networks have been a lifeline for elders across the New York City, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic hit LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers hard and exacerbated the deep isolation that so many in this community experience. The impact of the pandemic continues to linger and is seen through the increased demand for SAGE's programs, services, and community among LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders. SAGE has redesigned our program and service delivery model to offer a variety of in-person, virtual, and hybrid options and across the network of SAGE Centers, are offering over 100 virtual and 200 in person programs each week. This model helps to draw elders in for in-person services, connection and community, while addressing the direct needs of homebound elders, those with mobility challenges or with caregiving or work responsibilities, and elders who have health concerns about returning to in-person programs and services. Virtual programming and grab-and-go meals also provide LGBTQ+ elders with community and support during. To support elders' nutritional needs and address food insecurity in the communities in which our SAGE Centers are located, SAGE has also opened community food pantries in Midtown Manhattan, Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn.

These vital services are made possible from the partnership with the New York City Council and has been funded by the LGBTQ Senior Services in Every Borough Initiative since its creation in FY15. When the program was first created, SAGE has partnered with GRIOT Circle, New York City's only staffed community-based organization specifically serving LGBTQ+ elders of color, through our joint SAGE-GRIOT Center on Flatbush Avenue to provide services in Brooklyn. Last Fiscal Year the New York City Council made history with the first-ever enhancement to the LGBTQ Senior Services in Every Borough Initiative since the program was created over eight years ago. The \$255,000 enhancement helped fuel the growing demand for LGBTQ+ aging services in Brooklyn by providing GRIOT Circle with direct funding to continue to serve LGBTQ+ elders of color and maintaining SAGE's funding to meet the growing demand among LGBTQ+ elders for services and programs at SAGE Center Brooklyn. It is crucial the FY24 budget renews funding for the LGBTQ Senior Services in Every Borough Council Initiative at the new FY23 funding level to continue to support the work of both organizations.

The New York City Council has also been an instrumental partner of our SAGEVets program, the only program in New York City and New York State designed to address the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ veterans. SAGEVets helps older LGBTQ+ military service veterans improve their access to Veterans Administration (VA) benefits, supports their overall health and wellness, and provides referrals to counsel regarding discharge status upgrades – all while improving veterans-serving organizations' LGBTQ+ competency. The needs of this population are deep; New York City is among the top ten cities in the nation with the highest concentrations of LGBTQ+ veterans, and over half of veteran New Yorkers are over the age of 65. The military's long history of enforced anti-LGBTQ+ policies followed by the discriminating Don't Ask Don't Tell policy mounted many barriers between older LGBTQ+ veterans and their Federal VA benefits, resulting in a disproportional amount of LGBTQ+ older veterans not accessing the services that they need and deserve. As New York's only program specifically serving LGBTQ+ veterans, SAGEVets also plays a large role in assisting older veterans who were discharged due to their sexual orientation or gender identity with discharge upgrades under the New York Restoration of Honor Act and Int. 479A-2018.

In FY24, SAGE requests restoration of our New York City Council funding, commensurate with FY23 levels. Support from the New York City Council fuels our services for the residents in Stonewall House and Crotona Pride House and the surrounding communities; sustains our citywide network of SAGE Centers and their robust virtual programming and complimentary case management; reinforces services to LGBTQ+ older veterans; and supports our mental health services for homebound LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders.

Specifically, SAGE requests:

- Renewal of **\$1,155,000** in Council Initiative LGBTQ Senior Services in Every Borough to fund programs and services at our network of SAGE Centers—LGBTQ+-affirming older adult centers—reaching over 5,000 LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected older New Yorkers with 100 virtual and 200 in-person programs each week.
- Renewal of **\$50,000** through the Senior Centers, Program and Enhancement Initiative to support care management services offered at SAGE Centers including crisis intervention,

care assistance, caregiving services, individual and group counseling, friendly visiting for homebound elders, legal services, and mental health referrals.

- Renewal of **\$100,000** from the Council's LGBTQ Caucus to allow SAGE to provide culturally and linguistically competent experienced care management at our expanded SAGE sites, in Harlem, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Staten Island including the continued expansion of services offered in-language in Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese.
- Renewal of **\$100,000** from the Citywide Initiative of Veterans Community Development to fund SAGEVets, New York City's only program designed to address the unique needs of older LGBTQ+ military service veterans which helps older LGBTQ+ veterans improve their access to Veterans Administration (VA) benefits, supports their overall health and wellness, and provides referrals to counsel regarding discharge status upgrades.
- Renewal of **\$100,000** under the Geriatric Mental Health initiative to support crucial mental health services to LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders who are frail and homebound including comprehensive screening for mental health and substance abuse issues, home visits and support groups, and referral to partner health care and substance abuse programs.
- Member support under the Support our Seniors initiative to help provide safe transportation options to transgender and non-binary elders in response to a pattern of harassment on public transportation.

SAGE deeply values our partnership with the Council. I look forward to working with members of the Committee on Aging and the entire New York City Council to address the needs of LGBTQ+ elders in every district. Thank you, Chair Hudson, for your leadership and for providing me with the opportunity to testify.

MJ Okma

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<sup>i</sup> LiveOn NY, "Aging is Everyone's Business: Policies for Building a New York for All Ages," August 2021 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/562a3197e4b0493d4ffd3105/t/6113ce58c3617a75b357ad4c/1628687962789/Aging+is+Everyones+Business+FINAL+FINAL-min.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> New York State Department of Health, "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Demographics and Health Indicators: New York State Adults, 2019-2020," 2022 [https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/brfss/reports/docs/2022-16\\_brfss\\_sogi.pdf](https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/brfss/reports/docs/2022-16_brfss_sogi.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> AARP NY and SAGE, "Disrupting Disparities: Solutions for LGBTQ New Yorkers Age 50+," 2021 <https://aarp-states.brightspotcdn.com/ca/eb/c2353b1e45b3a7fa0f15991c47a6/disparities-lgbtq-full-final-spread-v4.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> LiveOn NY and Hunter College Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, "Aging is Everyone's Business: Policies for Building a New York for All Ages, 2021 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/562a3197e4b0493d4ffd3105/t/6113ce58c3617a75b357ad4c/1628687962789/Aging+is+Everyones+Business+FINAL+FINAL-min.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Turrini et al. "Assessing the health status and mortality of older people over 65 with HIV," 2020 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7644038/>

<sup>vi</sup> AARP NY, "Disrupting Disparities: Solutions for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers 50+," January 2021 <https://aarp-states.brightspotcdn.com/ca/eb/c2353b1e45b3a7fa0f15991c47a6/disparities-lgbtq-full-final-spread-v4.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Movement Advancement Project, "LGBT Older People & COVID-19," May 2020 <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/2020%20LGBTQ%20Older%20Adults%20COVID.pdf>



## **The Imperative for Digital Inclusion of the Most Fragile Aging Populations**

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Loneliness kills. This alone is reason enough to make sure that every older adult New Yorker has the capacity to interact digitally, as classes, social groups and communities are continuing to provide online access for seniors who are homebound and will continue to be so, even during periods when pandemics are waning. And what about isolated older adults living with cognitive, aural or visual impairments? New assistive technologies can help them participate, but how do we find these people, reach them and introduce them to these assistive technologies?

Further, it's not just about alleviating loneliness. Access to all services is increasingly migrating to online. Whether it's banking, healthcare or housing, access to services is increasingly digital only. Or the paper process places the applicant so far behind that their ability to participate or especially compete for say affordable housing opportunities, is severely disadvantaged.

Online access is the basic foundation for getting connected and efforts have correctly focused on achieving this first critical step. But there is another whole set of tools that seniors should be thinking about – remote monitoring and telehealth systems, which promote independence by providing support only when and where it is needed. From providing daily Activities of Daily Living (ADL) support and medication reminders, to one touch video calls to support teams, to wireless health and activity sensors that can alert caregivers when someone needs help.

It is very important that older adults understand not only the increasing imperative to embrace technology but are made aware of some of the other awesome ways that technology can enable them to remain in their homes longer. Indeed, by all reports, attitudes are shifting in technology's favor. Our own (unscientific) digital survey now includes 175 responses. To the statement "I would consider using safety monitor technology that would help me stay in my home safely": 89.7% agree (51.4% Agree, 38.3% Strongly Agree), 8% are Unsure and

only 2.3% either Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

The conundrum is that if someone is not already digitally connected, they are hard to find and engage. Intentional outreach efforts that go beyond ads in the subway are needed. Community based organizations, who are on the ground and in the field can be a critical resource, especially if they can effectively team with the offices of local elected officials. Ironically, old fashioned tools of canvassing, word of mouth community outreach and community info sessions may provide the bridge to technology access. Stonewall Community Development has been working on such a model and invites local elected officials to contact us and learn more about how we can partner to field test this approach and educate your older adult constituents about available technologies and provide access through pilots designed to engage them in the further development and applicability of these technologies to their own real-world needs.

I encourage council members to review and support NYC Council Budget Request **#149988 - Technology & Aging Information Sessions and Pilots** and to reach out to Stonewall CDC to discuss a collaboration.



**New York City Council  
Committee on Aging  
Chair, Council Member Hudson  
March 14, 2023**

**Oversight - Preliminary Budget Hearing – Aging  
Testimony from Shyvonne Noboa - Sunnyside Community Services**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the almost 7,000 older adults and caregivers we serve each year. And thank you for your leadership during a challenging time for our City. I am Shyvonne Noboa, Associate Executive Director of Older Adult Services at Sunnyside Community Services (SCS).

As part of the vast nonprofit workforce, SCS like so many other nonprofits and settlement houses, plays a role in the City's recovery. As a member of the Human Services Council, we are calling for a **meaningful COLA of 6.5%** to more adequately pay a workforce that has been on the frontlines supporting the most vulnerable New Yorkers long before the pandemic. The past three years have been incredibly challenging for our organization. This period has been extremely difficult for the people we serve as they navigated covid, including deaths in their families, loss of employment and increased social isolation in older adults. During this time, SCS has been called upon to do more with increasingly fewer resources. As our older adult community continue to return to receive vital in-person services, more than ever, we continue to see an increase in the need for support services. Today, I outline two areas we see deserve ongoing attention.

We are thrilled that older adults continue to come to our Older Adult Center. Our participation rates are increasing. But we are concerned, over time, about the increasing inflation costs and meeting the food needs of our members. Our director does a phenomenal job of budgeting food costs monthly as she sees the rising cost of raw food and supplies. Our kitchen staff does an amazing job of working within the budget while maintaining the high nutritious standard of cooking. As a member organization of LiveOn NY, we support their request of **\$38.4 million in additional funding to combat hunger among older adults across our industry.**

Secondly, the team at our Older Adult Center identify affordable housing as another critical area in need of attention. We have older adults contact our staff in search of affordable housing and often feel helpless to redirect them and connect them to real resources. **We are in support of the City's successful Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) program and urge you to increase funding for more affordable housing.** One of the newer members at our center is an immigrant older adult from Ecuador, and she is a home health aide. She will not qualify for social security, and she lives in a basement room that is only accessible via stairs. She would love to have a small private studio, where she does not have to share a kitchen or bathroom. But with her 28,000/year income, making her not eligible for most NY Connects apartments and high rents, that dream is unattainable. We need more affordable housing for people like her.

The City has the opportunity to make meaningful, long-term investments to ensure all older adults and the community providers that work in their service, have the opportunity to provide them with the just and equitable access of services they deserve.

Thank you



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2024 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Aging  
Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Submitted by Tara Klein, Senior Policy Analyst  
March 14, 2023**

Thank you for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 46 neighborhood settlement houses, including 40 in New York City, that reach over 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life at 770 locations. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

UNH members provide a wide variety of services to over 80,000 older New Yorkers each year by operating programs such as older adult centers (OACs), Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), home delivered meal (HDM) programs, Geriatric Mental Health, case management programs, and others, often funded and contracted by New York City Aging (NYC Aging or DFTA) and the City Council. UNH and its settlement house members employ the philosophy that older adults are valued members of our neighborhoods, whose wisdom and experience are important to the fabric of our communities.

UNH is concerned about budgetary matters that are quickly reaching crisis levels and will need intervention from the City. These include record-high levels of inflation without adequate contract amendments to match, growing challenges with recruitment and retention of staff due to low wages and competition from other industries, rising demand for service including from the growing number of older adults in New York City, growing capital and infrastructure needs, and the looming fiscal cliff we face in City programs when American Rescue Plan funds expire in a few short years. NYC Aging continues to receive one of the smallest agency budgets in the City despite growing needs, and the agency suffers from years of systemic underinvestment. We welcome the Council's advocacy in the FY 2024 Budget in alleviating these concerns, including with NYC Aging and the Administration.

**Overview**

In FY 2024, there are a number of funding needs to support older New Yorkers. UNH urges the City to take the following budget actions:

- Invest in the human services workforce:
  - Pass Intro 510 to establish a prevailing wage schedule
  - Invest in a 6.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA)
  - Support providers in hiring multilingual and immigrant staff
- Invest \$64.8 million to combat older adult hunger, including:
  - Home Delivered Meals: \$14 million for inflation costs, \$567,000 to address the waitlist, and \$4 million for weekend and holiday meals
  - Older Adult Centers: \$46.3 million for inflation costs for OACs and congregate meals, and continuing grab and go meals
- Address unmet needs for older adults including:
  - \$7.5 million for digital literacy and devices to facilitate virtual programming
  - \$5 million for communications, marketing, and outreach for providers
  - Evaluate consultant pricing at OACs
  - \$1.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the case management program
  - \$15.4 million to support continued growth in demand of the home care program
  - Invest in capital needs
- Support Council Aging Initiatives, including:
  - Increase Support Our Seniors - \$9.7 million
  - Restore NORCs - \$6.4 million
  - Restore DOHMH Geriatric Mental Health Initiative - \$3.4 million

### **Invest in the Human Services Workforce**

While it is crucial to examine the needs of older adults and the supportive programs that allow them to age in place, we must ensure that the workers providing these services are supported. Low wages for aging services positions have contributed to a staffing crisis, and without increased budgets in government contracts to cover wage increases, nonprofits will be unable to recruit and train the next generation of aging services workers, setting future New Yorkers up for significant barriers to accessing services. Our society has devalued care work for far too long, and it is time that we invest in this workforce to ensure that they earn wages that properly compensate them for the skilled and important work they do.

More broadly, human service workers as a sector are grossly underpaid. A recent analysis by UNH found that human service workers face similar economic insecurity as the participants in their programs; in our report, [\*The Need to Strengthen the Economic Security of the Settlement House Workforce\*](#), we note that government funding decisions and chronic underinvestment in human services have led to poverty-level wages for essential frontline workers at settlement houses.

Low wages, exacerbated by burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to chronically low staffing levels at human services organizations. Our settlement house members report more, longer vacancies, higher turnover, and significant challenges recruiting in a competitive labor market. Insufficient staffing has made it increasingly difficult for nonprofits to serve New Yorkers, leading to under-enrollment and program closures – such as the recent announcement of the closure of Sheltering Arms – which then leads to budget reductions and a vicious cycle that harms New Yorkers seeking services.

For years, the human services sector has warned of a staffing crisis citing low wage levels. Over the last two years, the City ignored a COLA request and instead issued a one-time bonus for our workforce that was equivalent to less than 1%, and a “contract enhancement” that led to contract-by-contract increases of between 1.5 and 2.5%. This investment is wholly insufficient to have a meaningful impact on the nonprofit workforce. Even with an annual 5% COLA, for most frontline workers starting at or around minimum wage, five years of raises would still mean an hourly wage of under \$20. Coupled with

inflation and the City's tendency to extend contracts without any cost escalators or budget modifications, this salary problem will only be solved by a significant investment in the workforce.

**Create a Prevailing Wage Schedule for Human Services Workers:**

For these reasons, UNH supports Introduction 510 (Stevens), which would establish prevailing wage schedules for human service workers, require agencies to include sufficient funding to cover those wages in contracts, and track implementation of those wages by human service contractors; and we know that this legislation would need to pass through the budget process to be effective. While prevailing wage schedules are an imperfect tool to address the current conditions faced by human service workers, it is a significant improvement from the status quo. This process to design a true prevailing wage system is arduous and will require careful analysis, but we cannot afford to continue ignoring the need. For years, the government at every level has asked nonprofit partners to do "more with less." This dynamic has pushed our sector to a real breaking point, and our workforce has suffered the consequences.

**Include a 6.5% COLA for Human Services Workers:**

Given the gravity of the human services staffing crisis, we are also supportive of a 6.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for this workforce in FY 2024, in alignment with the JustPay campaign. We also ask the Council to ensure it is included in the budget as a "cost of living adjustment" and not some other named initiative so providers can rely on these funds being stable and recurring.

**Support Providers in Hiring Multilingual and Immigrant Staff:**

Providers report that their widespread hiring and retention challenges are especially difficult when they need to hire bilingual staff to meet a community's diverse language needs, especially social workers and case managers. With a narrow applicant pool, these staff are often even more difficult to find when salaries are so low. Some settlement houses report job postings of up to a year for these positions. On top of increasing salaries across the board to make aging programs competitive employers, the City should consider additional ways to support providers, especially for hiring bilingual staff, such as coordinating strategic marketing and outreach campaigns. For example, NYC Aging could join job fairs, visit social work schools, and/or run ad campaigns that share the value of working with older adults.

In addition, several settlement houses have expressed concerns that hiring staff who speak the necessary languages can be complicated by immigration and visa issues. Many job applicants are in the process of applying for work authorization in the U.S. and require an employer to sponsor them. This can be prohibitively costly, with costs falling on both the employer and the applicant. While there are certainly legal complications around visa issues, the Council should investigate whether the City could help cover these costs. This would remove a major barrier in the hiring process.

**Address Older Adult Hunger**

As was discussed in length at the Council's hearing on Food Insecurity and Older Adults on December 14, 2022, food insecurity remains very high among older New Yorkers, and the programs that support them are in urgent need of additional resources to meet the need. According to recently-released Census data from the Household Pulse Survey, between December 2022 and February 2023, 21 percent of older adults in the NYC metro area with less than \$25,000 in household income reported that they did not have enough to eat in their household in the past seven days. In the FY 2024 Budget, the City needs to invest an additional \$64.8 million to combat older adult hunger, focused on the home delivered meals program and congregate meals at older adult centers.



## **Home Delivered Meals: \$14 million for inflation costs, \$567,000 to address the waitlist, and \$4 million for weekend and holiday meals:**

Nonprofit home delivered meals (HDM) providers deliver a daily nutritious meal to homebound older adults who are unable to prepare their own food, while also providing case management and regular in-person wellness checks for those at risk of social isolation. HDM is a key service to support older adults, and has become even more crucial since the beginning of the pandemic. Nine UNH members currently provide home delivered meals, either as lead contractors or subcontractors.

Thank you to the Council for helping secure the home delivered meals increase in last year's budget, bringing the per-meal reimbursement rate from \$9.58 to \$11.78 per meal. UNH has advocated for this rate increase for many years, and finally reaching this number was a major accomplishment for providers who have faced chronic underfunding. Given this, it is difficult to now ask for another increase, but the reality is that an increase is needed to keep HDM programs whole and functional.

UNH and our advocacy partners determined the \$11.78 figure that was funded last year in two ways. First, it represents the average cost for a home delivered meal for urban areas in the United States in 2015, according to a report by Mathematica Policy Research<sup>1</sup> which is the most recently available national analysis done on this program. Second, in 2019 UNH and LiveOn NY, assisted by SeaChange Capital Partners, conducted an independent analysis of the true costs of home delivered meals programs in New York City and confirmed \$11.78 as close to the actual true cost of a home delivered meal, though costs varied by provider.

These analyses confirm that \$11.78 was an appropriate and much-needed increase at the time we began advocating for it. However, that was before the global pandemic, before the recent HDM RFP which added new programmatic requirements (like meal choice to meet diverse populations), and before the exorbitant 2022-2023 inflation rates. Given these changes, it is time once again for the City to invest in increases for the HDM program.

### ***Inflation and Rising Costs:***

Record-high inflation is impacting older adults. According to the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, between December 2022 and February 2023, 94 percent of older adults aged 60 and older in the NYC metro area believe that prices have increased. The perception of higher prices has impacted older adults' spending decisions and tradeoffs. For example, among older adults who believe that prices have increased, 23 percent said that they are purchasing less produce or meat to cope with higher inflation, 20 percent are contributing less to savings and/or retirement accounts, and 18 percent have decreased their use of utilities such as heat and electricity. In that same time frame, 38% of older adults in NYC reported that they experienced difficulties with expenses such as food, rent or medical expenses, and two-thirds of older adults in the NYC metro area reported that they were moderately or very stressed about the increase in prices in the past two months.

Inflation rates are also exacerbating chronic underfunding issues for the HDM program. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,<sup>2</sup> food costs in the New York City metro area, as of September 2022, increased by over 8 percent since the previous year, while the cost of gasoline has skyrocketed – in the spring of 2022 rates had jumped by nearly 50% over the previous year, while as of September they had stabilized somewhat and risen by “only” 14% over the previous year. In addition, Governor Kathy Hochul recently identified 13% as the appropriate number that costs have risen.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.mathematica.org/publications/older-americans-act-nutrition-programs-evaluation-meal-cost-analysis>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/regions/new-york-new-jersey/cpi-summary/ro2xq01a.htm>

HDM providers have been directly hit by these rising raw food and transportation costs, and these increases have been extreme and very detrimental to maintaining quality programs. Settlement house HDM providers also note that there are other increased costs that must be budgeted for, including new technology costs and meal bags for deliverers, as well as higher vehicle liability insurance rates and replacement catalytic converters for vehicles that had these parts stolen. All of these costs have had an impact on staff retention and recruitment: due to contract rates, salaries are forced to be kept low which makes it difficult for providers to hire competitively. One provider noted that “if we do not raise compensation in HDM [contracts], we will lose staff. The costs of gasoline, vehicle insurance, vehicle maintenance, food costs and health insurance limits our ability to raise hourly [wage] rates.”

To reflect higher gas and raw food costs due to inflation and needs we are seeing on the ground, the City should include appropriate cost escalators for providers each year, which for FY24 entails a \$14 million increase in the program, which would bring the per-meal rate up from \$11.78 to \$14.96 per meal.<sup>3</sup> This represents a 27% increase. Other increased costs that providers face must also be budgeted for, including technology costs for meal deliverers and higher vehicle liability insurance rates.

#### ***Waitlists:***

The COVID-19 pandemic drew renewed attention to the HDM program, showing just how valuable it is for homebound older New Yorkers. A side effect of the pandemic has been new demand for HDM – both early in the pandemic when older people were fearful to leave their homes and at the end of the GetFood/DFTA Recovery Meals programs in June 2022, when people still enrolled in that program had to begin to receive their meals elsewhere and many turned to HDM. In the first four months of FY 2023, NYC Aging reported that 1.4 million home delivered meals were delivered to nearly 23,000 homebound older New Yorkers, an increase of 12 percent from the same period in FY 2022.<sup>4</sup> This new influx of meal recipients has naturally added new costs for HDM providers. The City took some steps to address this in the FY23 budget, but moving forward the Council should urge NYC Aging to conduct an updated analysis of HDM demand by neighborhood and adjust contracts and funding accordingly. The most recent numbers suggest a waitlist that will require \$567,000 to address.

#### ***Weekend and holiday meals:***

The City must also invest \$4 million to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals that are not provided through NYC Aging. Citymeals on Wheels contracts for these meals under a public-private partnership, but has not received an increase in many years.

#### **Older Adult Centers: \$46.3 million for inflation costs for OACs and congregate meals, and continuing grab and go meals:**

Older adult centers (OACs) are crucial supports for older New Yorkers. OACs continue to offer both in-person and virtual activities, provide in-person congregate meals and grab and go meals when available, and serve as essential partners with the City in meeting public health goals. Settlement houses in UNH’s network operate 42 standalone OACs and two network OACs, serving tens of thousands of older adults in these centers.

#### ***Food Costs and Inflation:***

As described in-depth in the home delivered meals section above, the last year has seen very high inflation rates across the board. OACs have been significantly impacted, especially for food costs for congregate meals, gas prices for OACs with transportation components, utilities, and other areas. The City must ensure inflation costs are included annually in future budgets. This year, the City should

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<sup>3</sup> Per the Mayor’s Management Report, the number of meals served in FY24 is estimated to be on par with FY23 at 4,390,494. This number multiplied by the new proposed rate to come to the total funding request..

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2023/dfta.pdf>

include \$46.3 million to address inflation costs. This number applies a 23% inflation rate number to relevant OAC categories and matches need we are seeing on the ground.

***Continuing grab and go meals:***

Grab and go meals were a tremendous innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic, initially serving as an interim solution before the Get Food program was set up and later serving as an option for older adults who were ready to go outside but not to spend time eating indoors in a crowd. We were disappointed to hear DFTA was ending the grab and go option this past summer, unless providers had included grab and go meals in their recent OAC contracts. Over the summer, centers still reported grab and go as a very popular option, with many older adults still hesitant to be unmasked and eating congregate meals indoors. Behaviors have not significantly changed since then: providers report that older adults are still concerned about COVID and this is affecting their utilization numbers for congregate meals. At the same time, food insecurity remains high among older adults, and anything the City can do to address these needs should be embraced. Moving forward, DFTA must ensure grab and go meals continue to be a viable option at all older adult centers that want to offer them – and not only those that had the foresight to include grab and go in their contracts.

**Address Unmet Needs for Older Adults**

In addition to addressing issues with older adult hunger and the workforce, the City should make the following targeted investments to address unmet needs for older adult programs:

**\$7.5 million for technology enhancements:** The pandemic changed the way older adults access services in New York City. Nonprofit providers offered virtual programming and services while buildings were closed to in-person activities, and given their success many continue to provide hybrid services and leverage technology as an important component of running a successful older adult program. Along with the benefits of this innovation, hybrid programming comes with some unique needs. First, older adults face a digital divide with a steep learning curve and accessibility issues. There are many technology needs, including at OACs and in older adults' homes. Technology training continues to be a high need, as well. Providers also report an ongoing staffing and cost challenge of running in-person and hybrid programs concurrently. A \$7.5 million investment would address many of these challenges. It would help to expand NYC Aging's virtual programming accessibility through an online database, provide devices, and connectivity, and offer technology literacy support provided by community-based organizations.

**\$5 million for OAC outreach and marketing:** Utilization rates at older adult centers are currently inconsistent, with some at full or above capacity and others struggling to maintain pre-pandemic participation levels. This is understandable, given the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older adults and their ongoing hesitancy to spend time in crowded indoor spaces. Providers also report that concerns around perceived crime in New York City – especially anti-Asian hate crimes – has caused many older adults to be hesitant to go outside and engage in their communities. We understand NYC Aging is very concerned about getting older adults back into OACs, and as part of this effort they have begun a public awareness campaign including subway and bus ads. We propose a \$5 million fund for outreach and marketing that would go directly to OAC providers, to enable them to do hyper-local outreach such as flyering, additional phone calls, and other activities to help bolster participation levels.

**Evaluate consultant pricing at OACs:** Settlement houses report that rates for consultants who offer programs and activities at OACs have skyrocketed in recent months; in some cases hourly prices have doubled. Consultant pricing also varies widely across the board. For example, according to providers an arts instructor can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$125 an hour, with the average around \$60-75 per hour. Despite these increases, OAC budgets remain tight and have not accommodated this fluctuation. The

City should address this situation either by providing funds to cover these higher consultant rates, or looking into coordinating a pool of trusted consultants with standard rates and connecting OACs with those trusted consultants.

**\$1.4 million for Case Management Agencies:** Case Management Agencies refer older adults to benefits and services, including to the home delivered meals program. This program is overburdened and maintains lengthy waiting lists, which are a major systemic barrier to accessing services. We were pleased that the FY23 budget included additional funds for Case Management, in part to address the end of the DFTA Recovery Meals program and the resulting added capacity for case management referrals to the home delivered meals program. We were subsequently deeply troubled to see the \$4.3 million PEG reduction in the FY23 November budget modification. For FY24, we urge the City to ensure Case Management Agencies are able to effectively clear waitlists and connect older adults with the services they need. A new \$1.4 million investment will address current wait lists for this program and ensure all individuals can be screened and referred appropriately.

**\$15.4 million for non-Medicaid home care:** While most home care in New York is offered by State-licensed home care services agencies (LHCSAs), there is also DFTA home care that supports qualifying individuals who are not on Medicaid. A \$15.4 million investment would support continued growth in demand in the NYC Aging home care program, including addressing waiting lists and expanding the hours of home care service available to older adults requiring additional support. In addition, to support the overall home care workforce we must pass the State's full Fair Pay for Home Care bill (S.3189 (May) / A.TBD (Paulin)), which would ensure all home care workers are paid uniform and fair wages across the State.

**Invest in capital needs:** Aging services programs have a number of long-standing capital needs that continued to grow during the pandemic. Needs vary by provider and include building repairs, kitchen equipment, HVAC units, storage space, new home delivered meals vans, and van repairs. Funding for many of these needs has been slow to be approved by the City. Van replacements in particular are an urgent need, and we are glad the City recently announced over \$3 million to purchase 44 new vehicles for HDM providers. However, more is needed: some lead contractors report that they are not receiving as many vehicles as they need, while subcontractors are not eligible for these vehicles and report the same urgent issues as lead contractors. In addition, we are disappointed that these funds were secured from Council Initiative funding this year, which could otherwise have gone to funding programmatic needs and enhancements at OACs and other programs. Moving forward, the Council should advocate with DFTA and OMB to invest more in capital funds for aging services providers to make key infrastructure upgrades and repairs in their programs, including providing more HDM vans for lead contractors and subcontractors.

### **Support Council Aging Initiatives**

UNH greatly appreciates the Council's long-standing support for aging through funding invested in Citywide Initiatives, which provide enormous support for older adults and the programs that support them. Aging in particular benefits from a large share of Council funding that the network relies on to carry out essential services, with initiatives such as Support Our Seniors, NORCs, Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations, and Senior Centers, Programs & Enhancements. Some Council funds support entire programs that do not have other state or city contracts, and others pay for entire staff lines, or give programs the flexibility to hire consultants and fill programmatic gaps.

In FY 2024, the Council must restore funding for all of its Citywide Initiatives for aging to at least FY 2023 levels, representing a total of \$31.4 million. Last year, several of the programs that were fully supported by the Council for many years received baselined contracts through the NYC Aging

OAC/NORC procurement. As a result, some of the awards shifted around, but as we noted last year we hope the total investment will once again not be reduced given the enormous value of these funds to the aging network. In particular, we know the Council directed about \$3 million in Council funds to pay for 44 new hotshot vans for home delivered meals contractors, which were urgently needed. These funds could once again be used for additional vans for contractors and subcontractors, or for other one-time capital or infrastructure needs. We also urge a targeted increased investment to Support Our Seniors, a small increase for NORC nursing, and restoring and rebranding the DOHMH Geriatric Mental Health Initiative. Finally, we strongly urge the Council to work with the Administration to address payment delays for discretionary awards, which are chronically slow and lead to enormous difficulty for providers to budget for and spend this money.

- **Increase Support Our Seniors - \$9.7 million:** Support Our Seniors provides flexible funding to each Council District to support local aging services. Anecdotal evidence highlighted earlier suggests there are growing costs and unmet needs in NYC Aging-contracted programs. An additional \$50,000 per Council District, amounting to \$2.6 million and a total initiative value of \$9.7 million, would allow Council Members to respond to those local needs and continue to support efforts that address transportation issues, social isolation, technology needs, and more.
- **Increase Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) Initiative - \$6.4 million:** NORCs help thousands of older adults remain healthy, stable, and able to age in place by offering health care, social services, and socialization opportunities right at home. For the last several years, the City Council has included funding to support the City's NORCs. Because of the Council's enthusiasm for this program, we have been able to bring resources and attention to the needs of a large and rapidly growing older adult population. Last year's NORC funding was \$6.1 million, representing a decrease from previous years' level of \$6.4 million. This year, we urge the Council to once again include \$6.4 million to account for rising nursing costs.

For the last four years, this funding has included support for nursing services in NYC Aging-contracted NORCs, which in FY 2023 was about \$2.1 million. This funding fills a gap left by the reduction of pro-bono nursing services that are required by NORC contracts. Despite hopes that the new NORC contracts would eliminate the need for this funding, NORCs report there is still a need. In addition, the standard hourly rate to hire nurses has risen over the last year, with the largest provider, VNS Health, raising their hourly rate from \$85 to \$95 per hour since last year. To account for this increase, the nursing money should account for this increase of approximately 11.5%, bringing the total pot back up to about \$6.4 million. Council funding also goes to some state-contracted Neighborhood NORCs, and serves as a required matching fund grant for these contracts that providers rely on. Finally, Council funding has periodically gone toward building new NORCs, some of which were awarded multi-year contracts in the recent NYC Aging procurement and now receive baselined funding. We urge the Council to once again support NORCs with \$6.4 million this year.

- **Restore and Rebrand DOHMH Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (GMHI) - \$3.4 million:** UNH is a long-time supporter of the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (GMHI), a Council Initiative funded under DOHMH. GMHI funds mental health services in community spaces where older adults gather, such as senior centers, NORCs, and food pantries. GMHI increases the capacity of community-based organizations serving older adults to identify mental health needs, provide immediate mental health interventions, and refer clients for further psychiatric treatment when necessary.

It is important to note that this program is different from the DFTA/NYC Aging Geriatric Mental Health Program. Due to frequent confusion between these two similar but distinct programs, we urge the Council to rename GMHI to Older Adults Mental Health or a similar variation this year.

Even before the pandemic hit, the aging services network expressed an overwhelming demand to expand mental health services for older adults, especially at older adult centers and NORCs and in multiple languages. Given patterns of increased demand since the start of the pandemic, we are thrilled that the Council funded a significant expansion to this program in FY22, allowing the program to reach 13 new sites and supporting long-needed increases for existing providers. GMHI currently supports 35 organizations total, 18 which are UNH members.

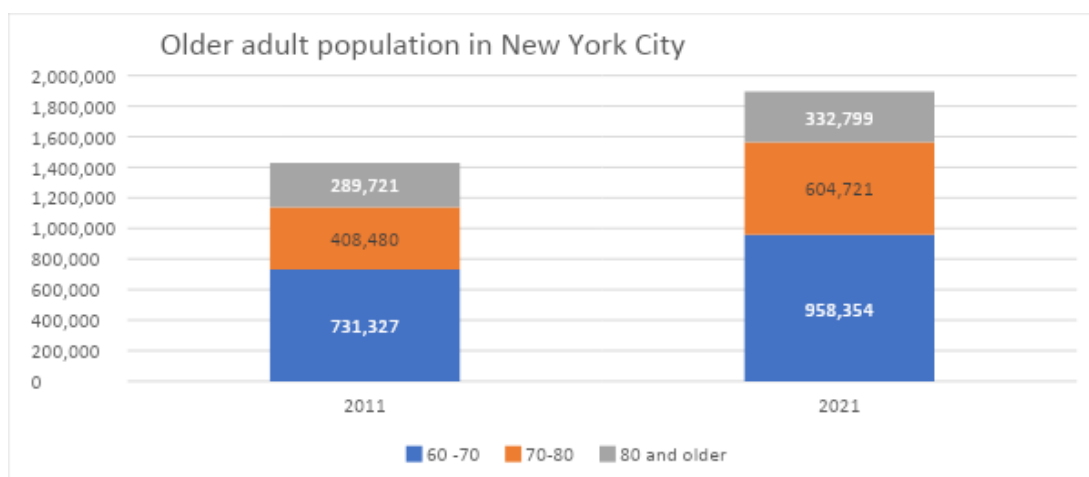
While contract registration and payment have been delayed – a systemic problem across human services contracts across the City that must be addressed – providers report very positive results from their GMHI funding. One newer GMHI recipient uses the funding across their aging services programs to screen, identify, and refer seniors to mental health services. Another newer recipient notes that they used the funds to bring on a bilingual worker, and trained case workers across their senior centers to conduct mental health and substance abuse screenings. A long-time GMHI recipient is using their funding increase to strengthen individual and group mental health programming, and to expand training opportunities for staff and clients. Given the vast success of this program, we urge the Council to restore full funding to GMHI of \$3,405,540 in FY 2024.

### **The Growing Older Adult Population and Changing Demographics**

The Census recently released data on older adults in New York City as part of the 2021 American Community Survey, and the findings show there is a steadily growing older adult population in NYC, the City's older adult population has become more racially diverse over the past decade, there is an increase in the number of older adults living alone, and there is an increasing number of older adults who are reliant on SNAP benefits. This data provides further evidence about the need for additional investments in City aging services in FY24.

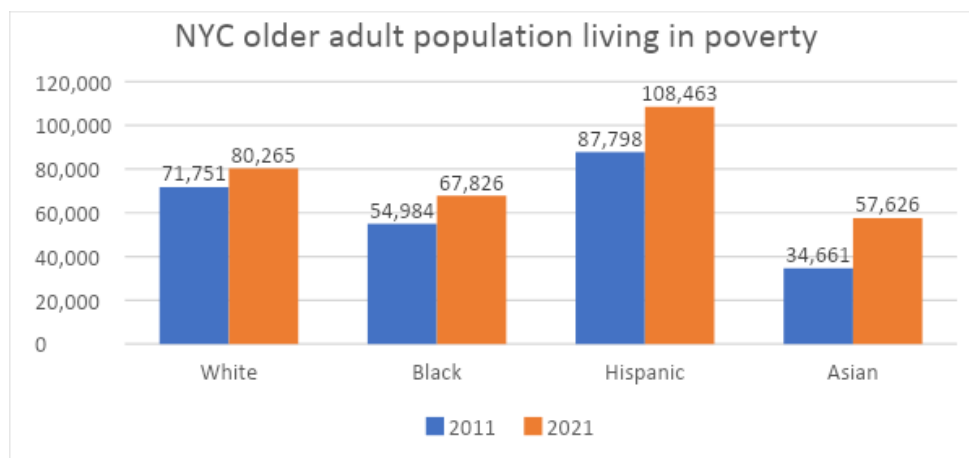
#### **Steadily growing older adult population in NYC**

- As of 2021, there are now roughly 1.9 million older adults aged 60 and over living in New York City, up from 1.4 million a decade ago (in 2011).
- As of 2021, older adults now make up 22 percent of all New York City residents, up from 17 percent a decade ago (2011).



### Increase over past decade in the number of older adults living poverty

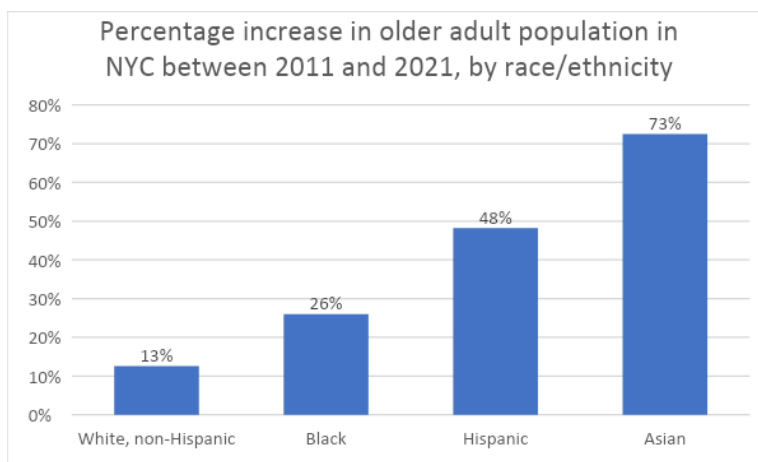
- Citywide, more than a third of older adults aged 60 and over live in poverty.
- Asian and Latinx older adults are twice as likely as White older adults to live in poverty.
- The number of the City's older adults living in poverty has increased by 28 percent over the past decade, from 243,000 in 2011 to 325,000 in 2021. Increase has been notable among the City's Asian older population – the number of Asian older adults living in poverty has increased by 66 percent since 2011.



- Older adult poverty rates are highest in the Bronx and Brooklyn (as of 2021)
  - Nearly 1 out of every 4 older adults in the Bronx live in poverty (24 percent)
  - 1 out of every 5 older adults in Brooklyn live in poverty (20 percent)

### NYC's older adult population has become more racially diverse over the past decade

- In 2011, White New Yorkers made up 40 percent of the City's older adult population; by 2021, this share had declined to 33 percent.
- Hispanic share of the City's older adult population edged up from 23 percent in 2011 to 25 percent in 2021.
- Asian share of the City's older adult population increased from 12 percent of older New Yorkers in 2011 to 15 percent by 2021; overall, the Asian older adult population in NYC has increased by a staggering 73 percent between 2011 and 2021, while the White older adult population rose by just 13 percent over the same time period. In Queens, Asians now make up a quarter of the borough's older adult population, up from 19 percent a decade ago.



- Over the past decade, the number of foreign-born New Yorkers increased by 45 percent, from about 684,000 in 2011 to nearly a million by 2021 (994,000). Immigrant New Yorkers now comprise more than half (52 percent) of NYC's older adult population, up from 48 percent a decade ago.

*Increase in number of older adults living alone*

- As of 2021, there are now more than 500,000 single-person older adult households in NYC, a 23-percent increase from a decade ago (in 2011). Single-person households make up 44 percent of older adult households in NYC

*Increasing number of older adults are reliant on SNAP benefits*

- The number of older adults receiving SNAP benefits has increased by 39 percent over the past decade, from about 331,000 in 2011 to about 459,000 in 2021.
- Since 2019, the number of older adults with SNAP benefits has increased by 10 percent.
- Overall, 24 percent of older adults receive SNAP benefits, as of 2021.
- Usage of SNAP benefits is higher among foreign-born older adults: Nearly half of foreign-born older adults reported receiving SNAP benefits in 2021, compared to 40 percent of US-born older adults.

Thank you. To follow up, please contact me at [tklein@unhny.org](mailto:tklein@unhny.org).



**Visiting Neighbors' Testimony  
New York City Council's Committee on Aging  
Hearing April 13th, 2023**

My name is Dr. Cynthia Maurer and I am the Executive Director of **Visiting Neighbors**. Thank you for the opportunity to submit Testimony. We are grateful to the NYC Council for your support of our vital programs in our current fiscal year and we need you to continue that support in 2024, as we have not stopped working and have continued to support our seniors. **We provide life enhancing and essential services to hundreds of seniors and continue to be on the front-lines.**

We have had an increase in demand for our services all throughout COVID and beyond. What remains a constant throughout it all is our mission, the population we serve and our great appreciation of all of your support along the way. This support enables us to keep going, to keep seniors safe, informed, and connected, as healthy, active and engaged with their community as possible, feeling a lot less lonely and fearful and in their own cherished homes.

**Our mission:**

Now in our 50<sup>th</sup> year, Visiting Neighbors, enables individuals age 60+ to remain independent and safe in their own homes and a vital part of the New York City Community. Through programs of "neighbors helping neighbors," volunteers, supported by Visiting Neighbors' professional staff, help older adults alleviate loneliness and isolation, provide mental stimulation and emotional security, share information about wellness and health related concerns and encourage physical independence and quality of life at home. Visiting Neighbors champions the power of the volunteer and encourages interdependence so that mutual learning and understanding bring generations together to share life experiences and gain respect for each individual's uniqueness.

The organization promotes a positive acceptance of life after sixty and the value of the elderly in society. Visiting Neighbors' main programs; are *Friendly Visiting, Shop & Escort, Telephone Reassurance, Health Advocacy, Student Nursing, and Health & Wellness (Physical, Mental and Emotional), Therapeutic Walking, Intergenerational Friendship and Learning, Case Assistance, Caregiver Support, Remembering Special Occasions and Information & Referral.*

**Description of the population we serve:**

Visiting Neighbors' clients are age 60 and over. Currently our oldest client is 105 years of age and the average age is 90 (a decade ago it was 79). Our clients tend to be frail, with one or more ailments. We serve a diverse group of individuals, most of whom live

on fixed incomes and can't afford to pay for help, but are not Medicaid eligible and yet struggle financially as they fall through the cracks of assistance. There are no income eligibility requirements, nor a fee for services. Our population is among the most vulnerable in the city. The senior who comes to us usually lives alone and has little or no family nearby to whom they can turn for support. Some have family that do not care. Some do have family that care, but are not in a position to help. Some have friends who are elderly themselves and not able to help. The seniors are often isolated, nervous about crossing streets and getting to and from their appointments safely. The majority of our clients have at least one significant health concern such as mobility issues, diabetes, macular degeneration, osteoporosis, COPD, CAD or peripheral neuropathy, etc. Our 850+ seniors who are receiving direct services regularly are proud and determined to remain independent, relevant and in their own homes. They express not wanting to be a burden to anyone and often feel very lonely, sad and anxious. We also provide information, help them stay calm, feel emotionally supported - including our sharing uplifting messages of hope and guidance to 1550+ individuals.

All of our clients are able to self-direct. However, individual personalities vary, with a few who are a bit offbeat or eccentric. Our volunteers escort clients to and from medical appointments and other vital errands, accompany them outside for fresh air, provide socialization or take a walk. Like many of us, they all want to be valued, understood and respected. We let them know they matter and help them regain/retain their sense of dignity and self-worth. Visiting Neighbors' seniors feel more confident knowing we are here to listen, offer support, comfort and guidance. We earn their trust. They understand that we do not judge them and know they will be treated with respect, empathy and kindness.

We serve seniors who reside in Manhattan, from South Ferry to 30<sup>th</sup> Street, river to river, but receive calls from all over NYC and its surrounding vicinity. We responded/respond to every call. During the pandemic we were compelled to stretch our reach and helped seniors just outside our catchment area because seniors had no one else to help them. Hundreds of volunteers of all ages rose to the challenge to help our seniors and generously gave their time and heart to support them.

### **Some additional current demographics:**

- 77% are female and 22% are male, 1% define themselves as non-binary
- 90% live alone
- 75% of our clients are over 80 and 33% are over 90
- 70% are homebound but can get outside with assistance
- 99% want to continue living in their own cherished homes and 1% seek support to transition into assisted living, nursing homes or their family's residence
- 98% of our clients can neither pay for private services, nor are eligible for Medicaid. We do not collect further socio-economic data, but collect info that seniors choose to share and we help individuals regardless of their finances or their ability to contribute.

**Our most significant accomplishment to date:** We let every senior we serve and every volunteer engaged in our programs know that they matter. We remain steadfast in our commitment to our mission. We focus on what is possible, we learn lessons from our own experiences and we have applied them. We proudly can say because of the Aging Committee and our New York City Council, our Local Legislators and Local Initiatives we are still here doing what we do best – making a difference in the lives of others, helping keep individuals focused on the positive and find ways to cope and experience more joy.

## **Our Core Programs:**

**Services and Activities we have been and are continuing to provide throughout this pandemic and beyond:**

### **Friendly Visiting & Shop and Escort Programs**

Volunteers are matched with seniors based on mutual interests, hobbies, needs, etc. to either spend a couple of hours a week providing companionship and/or take seniors to and from important medical appointments. Volunteers also pick up seniors after medical procedures, take them to and from getting their vaccinations, physical therapy, accompany them on walks, help with errands (such as escorts to/from banks, shopping, hair and nail salons, social programs, rehab centers. When a senior comes home from a hospital stay, we check in on them to make sure they have what they need. We will pick up medications and go shopping for supplies for aftercare, as well as provide emotional reassurance and a chance to vent about their experience. We have also helped seniors to: get pets to vets, Access-a-ride & SCRIE offices for sign up & renewals, department stores for clothes shopping, and cemeteries, etc. Volunteers escort seniors who want to vote in person. We are promoting seniors using absentee ballots when they can't get out and help get those ballots in the mail. We also work with another charity, "*Meals on Wheels*," to deliver Saturday meals to seniors in need. Sharing information about good nutrition and access to healthy food and essential supplies continues to be a main focus, as does facilitating seniors maintaining connections to the outside world and having correct health information.

### **Health Advocacy**

In the current fiscal year, to date, our staff has provided Information and Referrals to 580 seniors and 118 caregivers. Our Health Advocate helps our existing clients better communicate with their doctors, as well as formulate key questions to ask medical professionals to ensure they understand instructions when leaving their offices (including how to take medications, what they are for, what to expect and side effects). Our Health Advocate and trained cadre of volunteers also encourage seniors to go to see their doctors in the first place, as well as advocate for them when they are being admitted into the hospital. It always helps a patient to let medical personnel know someone is watching.

## **Student Nurses, Health and Wellness Programs**

All of our volunteers who are providing direct in-person contact services must be vaccinated and show proof of their completed card. Even as most restrictions have been lifted, the COVID threat continues and there is a lot of uncertainty. We have once again begun holding in- person wellness discussions, including an emotional venting sessions and lessons learned. All of the nurses are fully vaccinated verified by their respective schools. Throughout the pandemic staff shared wellness tips with our seniors, discussed exercises that were safe and doable at home and constantly related updated information regarding boosters.

We have been working with Mercy College (Fall, Winter & Spring Semesters and Summer sessions) and each set is supervised by their respective professor(s). The students work in conjunction with staff to hold small group presentations, as well as have one-on-one discussions on a variety of health concerns with our seniors. Students discuss heart health, fall prevention, nutrition, staying flexible, advanced directives and many other wellness topics. They also do medication reconciliation and discuss management of those medications, conduct in home assessments and check for possible safety hazards, check blood pressure and oxygen levels, discuss weight and/or cognition changes. We also use a wellness visit as an opportunity to update seniors' current emergency contact and primary care physician and keep lists of key info (i.e., medication list, amounts, dosage and time) readily handy. The nurses also address any issue a senior might have with balance problems, their gait, vision, depression, pain, changes in sleep habits, weight and/or cognitive changes.) Our Health Advocate and staff will follow up with seniors and provide referrals or suggestion to get to their doctor for further discussion. Students also go with frailer clients on therapeutic walks indoors (in hallways and lobbies on rainy days) and outdoors with our clients. Recently, our student nurses went out in pairs as they usually do when doing home assessments and wellness visits/check-ins. A new client, Joan Z., age 90, showed our student nurses a stack of 20 papers of info she gathered about organizations she reached out to for help during the pandemic after she fell and broke her back. She is also a diabetic (Type 1). She left a message with each of these organizations. Joan told the student nurses, *"Visiting Neighbors was the only one that had the decency to call me back."* After therapy, Joan is starting to walk again slowly, is gaining more confidence and she knows she can count on us for help.

### **Telephone Reassurance:**

Telephone reassurance requests have continued. Our phones over these past three years were constantly ringing. Our volunteers were amazingly generous with their time. Volunteers and staff contacted seniors who were/are feeling isolated, very lonely, and afraid or want a check-in call to get updated information or to make sure they are okay. We let them know they can have someone to talk to/with and if we don't know an answer to a particular question, we will research it and get back to them. For clients who went into the hospital, we check up on them, offer encouragement through calls and notes, and when they return home, send a cheer up team of two volunteers who while maintaining a safe distance, bring along a poster to be hung somewhere visible to serve as a reminder

that they are a survivor and loved by Visiting Neighbors. Most seniors just liked knowing someone is checking in with them to make sure, as 95-year-old **Sally M.**, who leaves a message for us every morning says, “I’m A OK.” Our Health Coordinator gives her a call every day to make sure.

We provide wellness visits to our clients to assess their overall health, as well as do safety home checks and discuss fall prevention to show them how they can sustain themselves age safely in place and/or feel better. We let them know they are not alone. Since the beginning of the pandemic there has been a surge in requests from seniors for telephone reassurance and it has not waned. We are continuing to provide much needed accurate information to seniors, sharing positive messages of hope and providing emotional support to those seniors who are feeling especially vulnerable, nervous and scared.

One aftereffect of the prolonged pandemic has been an increase in sadness and depression – and not just the seniors. Seniors have expressed feeling very lonely and emotionally frustrated and exhausted from the pandemic having gone on as long as it has and the volunteers have shared similar sentiments. We let them know they are not alone. We have been providing cheer-up support to our volunteers (ages 14-83) as well, letting them know, that while our circumstances may each be different, we are all in this together.

We continue to make five types of calls to seniors by trained volunteers, staff and board members, depending on their level of experience with us and what is needed.

1. Check-in calls with seniors who just want to receive a call to say that they are alright
2. Friendly Visiting Calls, ranging from chatting to lengthy conversations
3. Emotional Support Calls, Reassurance calls that are information-based sharing
4. Calls to new seniors who are/were sick and engaging in troublesome/risky behaviors that are of concern, including not following doctors’ directions, not taking proper doses of or following instructions of medications, going outside in cold weather without warm clothes, or without an umbrella in the rain, or using a shopping cart to hold on to instead of a needed walker and are seeking caring, “tough love” responses and parameters from us to remind them that they matter and need to make safer choices to remain independent
5. Discussions with caregivers and their caring neighbors/friends who may be overwhelmed, exhausted and/or stressed & need some guidance and emotional support.

**Visiting Neighbors’ Walking with Wisdom (an Intergenerational Friendship and Learning Program) = a program that developed as a response to the pandemic.**

**The Need:** As the pandemic has continued on for such a long time, it resulted in many seniors expressing to staff that they feel somewhat sad and depressed and having developed ‘cabin fever.’ They have a strong need to go outside for a safe walk accompanied by someone who could be by their side. Many seniors are afraid of walking

outside alone – afraid of tripping on a sidewalk, getting caught in a crosswalk, being knocked down by someone not paying attention while on a cellphone or someone stealing their purse, and just fear of falling in general.

**Our Call to Action:** Some of our more independent seniors just want to go outside to get a break from the confines of their apartment and would feel more comfortable with someone by their side. We responded by starting a Walking Program.

The requests for walks have increased substantially. As we further began developing this program, we enhanced the initial walking program to become more involved and include some gentle stretching and longer walks. It is now referred to as Therapeutic Walking. In addition to this, we also wanted to engage more young volunteers (ages 14-24) to interact with our seniors by taking walks together and having meaningful discussions with them along the way. This relatively new program has been a huge success and more seniors are asking to have companionship to go out for a safe walk. Seniors' self-esteem also took a huge hit during the pandemic. They want to feel vital, useful and that they have something to offer others – not just receive help for themselves.

We have helped guide some of the initial dialogues by providing ice breaker questions for some of the younger volunteers, yet many were able to just start chatting. We have been encouraging the young volunteers to share their experiences and ask questions as well. The young volunteers have all been respectful and have been expressing how they are enjoying the walks with their senior companions. We found that by participating, more seniors have been describing feeling good about themselves. They appreciate the opportunity to share their wisdom and stories in meaningful conversations. As the program is progressing, the young people have been gaining sensitivity towards the older adults they are walking beside, and are coming to realize they have a lot more in common than they initially thought. The young walkers come back to our office smiling after spending time with the seniors. We have also noticed an overall improvement in the young students listening and communication skills, punctuality and attitude in general.

**The Response:** The requests from seniors for walks have greatly increased and it quickly became one of our most popular and requested programs. This past fall's warmer weather in NYC has been enjoyed by the participants. The winter's cooler weather, which has been constantly fluctuating, has not deterred our clients from going outside on walks and our volunteers see to it that they are bundled up. We always keep extra scarfs and hats at our office. Cold weather accessories are knitted each year for us by a team of NYU volunteers called the Naughty Knitters. When it rains, walks are taken in hallways and lobbies.

### **Just a few samples of the wisdom our seniors have shared:**

- Reginald C., age 75: - "Always show gratitude."
- Susan S., age 83: - "Take a risk once in a while."
- Fran G., age 87 - "Be patient with yourself – sometimes it takes a while to succeed in something you are trying to accomplish. Not everything can be about instant gratification."
- Renee W., age 88: - "Learn how to cook at least a couple of dishes from your parents/family."
- Angie M., age 90: - "Be yourself, try to better yourself and keep going."
- Janet W., age 91: - "Start your education early."
- Arnold F., age 94: - "Exercise is so important. Do more exercise now and there will be less medication in your future."
- Rena B., age 96 - "Try to look at the bright side. Even though you have problems, it can always be worse."
- Kerry B., age 98 - "Learn the basics first and you won't go wrong. Don't take short cuts – it will actually lead to taking longer."
- Milton F., age 101 - "When you find someone you love make sure they have respect for you and a good heart."

### **Additional Activities:**

Visiting Neighbors remembers and celebrates special occasions! Local school children handmade personalized birthday cards, Valentines, Mother's and Father's Day cards. A few seniors became pen pals with some of the students. In the month of December, we had volunteers put together care packages of donated items, which can often be a time that is especially lonely for seniors who otherwise have no one to share in the joys of the season. Our volunteer "Elves" remind them that they are not alone and share holiday cheer. We have continued to send out birthday cards and cards of encouragement which the seniors expressed being very happy to receive. This February, we again had several grade school teachers work with their students to make Valentines Cards with positive messages of wishes for good cheer, happiness and hope. Now they are working on Happy Spring Cards. The seniors love them and many called us and/or wrote back to us sharing how the cards brought some brightness into their day. Regular communication with our clients continues to be our priority, with multiple mailings, such as, birthday cards, cheer-up and "hang-in there" notes, sympathy cards, seasonal newsletters and get-well greetings. We have unfortunately, still have had to make quite a few condolence calls to both seniors and volunteers this past year but our message is always one of "someone does care about you." We are creative in our efforts to communicate both important and uplifting mailings, including sending inspirational poems, word games and puzzles, stress relieving tips, at-home exercise using a chair and household items, easy recipes and messages of hope. Most of our seniors do not use advanced technology and/or do not

have emails. They really appreciate all of our mailings that include “hang in there” notes, sympathy cards, get well greetings, humorous stories and jokes and sharing information. We have been creative in our efforts including sending uplifting poems, word games & puzzles, stress relieving tips, easy recipes with limited number of ingredients that are also easy to get right now and messages of hope.

We also hand deliver donated bottles of hand sanitizer, face masks and covid home tests to seniors who request them. We were constantly in need of PPE supplies and spent quite a bit of energy going after donations of masks, gloves, sanitizing spray and hand lotion as the need continues.

### **Challenges:**

Our greatest challenge this past year was the nonstop nature of the needs of seniors (new and existing) who were asking for our help. We managed to achieve all of our expected results (and then some). Throughout the pandemic the request for services didn't stop. To add to that, we received calls from seniors who had contacted social service organizations/agencies/ groups whom they had known and/or previously received help from, only to be told, that those very services that they had previously offered, were no longer available. Several other organizations, told their seniors to contact Visiting Neighbors, since they were no longer providing some of their previous services involving direct contact like shopping and medical escorts. *Helen H.*, age 82, coping with metastatic lung cancer (stage 4), was one of many seniors who expressed gratitude for our help. We get her to medical treatments, see to it her shopping and errands get done, and that she receives ongoing calls from staff and empathetic and well trained volunteers.

Visiting Neighbors will continue to advocate on behalf of seniors to be better understood, treated with compassion, dignity and respect and to not be ignored, overlooked or forgotten, to help foster their self-esteem and self-worth and enable them to be as safe as possible.

### **Anticipated Problems for Seniors in 2024**

1. Concerns about loneliness and Isolation
2. Seniors who are afraid to go to their doctors and/or have difficulty expressing their fears/other communication issues to medical professionals
3. Seniors will need access to food and help with shopping and vital errands
4. Street Safety
5. Wellness concerns including needs for physical activity, mental stimulation, coping with depression, despair, low self-esteem & self-worth issues (especially amongst the oldest-old)
6. Emotional and mental health Issues caused by long covid and its' variants.



7. Seniors will need help staying informed with accurate and updated information on variety of issues. Seniors need support to face/deal with their fears, sadness, to eat right, to ask for help when they need it and not ignore their concerns.
8. Addressing ageism
9. Safety in the home
10. Providing opportunities for seniors to experience relevance, feeling seen & heard
11. Emergency preparedness
12. End of Life issues

### **Visiting Neighbor's goals and activities help to address these needs**

1. Seniors will be less lonely, know they are not alone and have someone they can turn to, will be less depressed and isolated.
2. Seniors will have better communications with their health professionals, will ask important questions, be better informed about their illnesses, ailments and diseases, take their medications as instructed and follow up with their appointments.
3. Seniors will get their shopping and as other vital errands done so they can retain their independence, remain in their homes and not be forced into a nursing home.
4. Seniors will be safely walking outside and avoiding potential street hazards.
5. Engage in meaningful activity, engage with others in meaningful and rewarding ways, and celebrate special occasions like birthdays and holidays with clients.
6. To address emotional and mental health issues, both individually and as a community. We help individuals feel relevant and connected to others in an environment of trust, respect, understanding, compassion, friendship and love.
7. To have seniors better informed on a variety of wellness & health issues and get them asking more questions.
8. Educating the general public to have greater understanding of our seniors' needs in the community to age-in-place and hopefully become more sensitive towards those needs.
9. With the senior's initial assessment by VN, a safety check of the home is carried out, making sure lighting is adequate, there is a shower grab bar, smoke alarm is working, area rugs are taped down, etc.
10. Seniors will feel seen and heard and connected to others and their respective communities. We help seniors cope with the myriad of changes associated with aging in general, as well as address their specific issues and help prevent problems from becoming worse or from having disastrous consequences.
11. Discuss planning for a personal emergency i.e., having info at the ready (names of doctors, meds taken – quantity and when, allergy info) and offer assistance and information i.e., regarding transportation alternatives; Access-A-Ride, Project Cart, Lift Car Service, MTA Reduced Fare, etc.
12. Assist seniors with questions regarding health care proxy, living will, having important and often difficult conversations, etc.

**Just as our seniors need us more than ever, we need your support more than ever!**

*We would not be able to do what we do, nor at the level and pace we have been working, without the support of our NY City Council, The Speaker and the Aging Committee Members!! **You in fact - are our heroes!***

*We need you to continue to be our champions, so we can continue to succeed as we have for the past 50 years, and be here for our seniors moving forward.* As our seniors are living longer, their needs intensify and require more time and attention. We actually have a list of seniors (and volunteers) who had requested to be put on a “hug” waiting list when restrictions eased. We have already started going through that list now. One client, *Millie M.*, age 88, was overjoyed after getting a hug from a staff member and literally cried happy tears, telling us she hadn’t been hugged since her husband died 5 years ago. It’s a reminder of just how powerful human interaction/connection is - including something as simple as receiving a warm loving hug from someone who cares.

We are counting on your continued support, as we face what may lay ahead with strength and resolve. We focus on what matters most – good health, inner-strength, peace-of-mind, forming friendships and experiencing more joy! Please continue to advocate for programs like *Visiting Neighbors* who are determined to help our seniors survive and thrive at home and stay safe through this pandemic and always.

Sincerely,

*Cynthia Maurer*

Cynthia Maurer, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Visiting Neighbors, Inc.  
3 Washington Square Village, Suite 1F  
New York, NY 10012  
[cmaurervn@aol.com](mailto:cmaurervn@aol.com)  
[info@visitingneighbors.org](mailto:info@visitingneighbors.org)  
212-260-6200



## NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON AGING

**Tuesday, March 14, 2022, 10:00 a.m.**  
**SUBJECT: Preliminary Budget Hearing**

Good morning. My name is Peter Kempner. I am the Legal Director and Senior Law Project Director at Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLTS). VOLTS was established in 1984 and our purpose is to leverage private attorneys to provide free legal services to low-income New Yorkers to help fill the justice gap.

Our largest program is the VOLTS Senior Law Project which serves low-income New Yorkers age 60+ primarily by providing Last Wills and Testaments, Powers of Attorney, Health Care Proxies, and other essential advance directives free of charge. These life planning documents enable our clients to properly prepare for possible incapacity and death. They allow our clients to maintain income, avoid homelessness, ensure that their dying wishes are fulfilled, and empower our clients' caregivers to obtain services necessary for our clients to access health care and age in place in the community.

While we strongly believe that all older adults should have the right documents in place as they plan for the future, we also have several initiatives that focus on vulnerable sub-sets of the older adult population. These include veteran, Spanish speaking, women identifying, and LGBTQIA+ older adults. We have created these initiatives because we know that it is important to deliver culturally competent services that are tailored to the communities we seek to serve.

The VOLTS Senior Law Project also provides legal services on a range of other civil legal issues including landlord tenant matters, access to benefits, consumer matters, and other civil legal needs. We provide training and ongoing support to social workers, older adult center staff, and pro bono attorneys to address our clients' legal issues. Another important part of our program is our efforts to educate older New Yorker about the value of planning for the future and how to access our free services.

Investing in services for older adult New Yorkers is more essential than ever. According to the Center for an Urban Future<sup>1</sup>, over the last decade the number aged 65+ older adults in New York City has increased by over 360,000 to more than 1.3 million people. They now represent 16.2% of the population, up from 12.3% of the population a decade ago. While the population of older New Yorkers has grown, so has poverty rates. It is estimated that 17.9% of the 65+ population in New York City lives below the federal poverty level, compared to 12.3% statewide. In addition, the poverty rates for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and immigrant older adults is even higher. The older adult population has also grown more diverse, in New York City, the older immigrant population has increased by 49% over the past decade.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nycfuture.org/research/keeping-pace-with-an-aging-new-york-state>

These numbers show that it is imperative that we must support a wide range of services to support the growing low-income older adult population in New York City, including access to free legal services. Free legal service providers are a critical component to ensuring that the needs of older New Yorkers are met. Legal services organizations are there to represent clients in eviction proceedings, fight the unlawful denial of benefits, and help obtain the documents older adults need to live in the community securely as they age.

Sadly, too few seniors have properly planned for the future. Among the U.S. population, it is estimated that only one-third have completed an advance directive. Many low-income older adults think that because they do not have resources or wealth to pass on to the next generation, they do not need to have advance directives in place. Instead of thinking about planning for the future in these terms, we encourage our clients to think about protecting what they have and accessing what they may need during their lifetime.

There are many examples of why low-income seniors experiencing cognitive or physical decline would need to have the right documents in place to stabilize their lives. A senior who has executed a Power of Attorney authorizes their agent to seek government benefits to pay for housing costs, to sign leases, to do their annual recertification for their NYCHA tenancy, to apply for and recertify for SCRIE benefits, and to deal with any issue that may arise with their apartment. A caregiver without Power of Attorney may find themselves powerless and forced to file for guardianship through the courts. Guardianship is an expensive, lengthy legal proceeding. Most low-income families cannot afford to retain counsel for a guardianship filing and it is very difficult to represent oneself in these matters. Even if a caregiver petitions successfully for guardianship, at that point the senior may have already lost their home or much needed public benefits. Documents like Power of Attorney mitigate the risk of an older adult losing their benefits, their housing, and their ability to age in place.

The Power of Attorney is just one tool we equip our clients and their caregivers with. A Health Care Proxy and Living Will can prevent unnecessary and unwanted medical interventions at the end of life. A Last Will and Testament can ensure that a family home is passed to the next generation and serve to preserve and build intergenerational wealth in communities of color. A Control of Remain form can ensure that an older adult is laid to rest according to their beliefs and wishes.

We want our client and their caregivers to have all the tools in their toolbox that they may need. This is why the New York City Council's financial support for our program is so crucial and we thank the Council for the funding you have given to our work for older adult New Yorkers. Volunteers of Legal Services looks forward to working with the members of the City Council and the administration to ensure that New York City can best support older New Yorkers in need.

Peter Kempner, Esq.  
Legal Director and Senior Law Project Director

New York City Council Committee  
Hearing on Aging Preliminary Budget  
March 14, 2023, Tuesday @ 10:00 am - City Hall

Good morning, I am Lisa Armogan, Vice President of New York Foundation for Senior Citizens. Thank you to Chair Hudson and to each Aging Committee Member for the support you provided for our fiscal year 2022-2023 Home Sharing and Respite Care Program.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of New York Foundation for Senior Citizens, we are requesting and would be deeply appreciative of an allocation from each of your individual and borough delegations' discretionary funds plus your support for the provision of a minimum of \$200,000 from the Speaker's city-wide fund within the City's 2023-2024 budget to ensure the continuation of our city-wide Home Sharing and Respite Care Program throughout the next fiscal year.

Our free home sharing service matches adult "hosts", who have extra space in their apartments or houses to share with responsible, compatible adult "guests" in need of affordable housing. One of the "matchmates" must be 60 or over. Over the past four decades, we have successfully matched over 2500 persons in 1250 shared living arrangements.

Respite care provides affordable, short-term, in-home attendant care at the low cost of \$17 per hour, for older adults who are attempting to manage at home with the help of others, thereby, preventing the need for their premature institutionalization. The program's respite care service also provides free temporary in-home care for functionally impaired older adult caregivers who experience a sudden inability to provide care. Over the past four decades, we have provided over 10,000 older adults and many more thousands of their caregivers with respite care services.

Our program's home sharing and respite care services, the only ones of their type in New York City, help older adults of all ethnic, racial, religious and income backgrounds and LGBTQIA+ populations.

Cumulative findings from our cost benefit analyses over the past 12 years have demonstrated that between October 1, 2010 and June 30, 2022 New York City provided our Home Sharing and Respite Care Program with a total of \$7,320,534. In turn, the program saved the City \$24,757,191.38 in Medicaid and other expenses by preserving and providing affordable housing as well as affordable in-home respite care and, thereby, preventing homelessness and institutionalization.

We believe our program is also cost effective and responsive to the City's older adults' housing problem as it prevents institutionalization in nursing homes and homeless shelters by enabling our home sharing hosts to afford to maintain and remain in their homes and our guests to obtain affordable housing. To build an apartment costs the City \$300-\$400,000. To maintain one homeless individual in our shelter costs the City over \$34,000 per year.

Therefore, on behalf of New York Foundation for Senior Citizens' Board of Directors, I urge you to provide allocations from each of your individual and borough delegations' discretionary funds plus support for the provision of a minimum of \$200,000 from the Speaker's city-wide fund toward this program. By so doing, you will afford the Foundation's Home Sharing and Respite Care Program the ability to continue to provide its desperately needed services that prevent homelessness and institutionalization, while ensuring essential savings in Medicaid expenses for New York City and State throughout fiscal year 2023-2024.

Thank you very much.



**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brianna Paden-Williams

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Live On NY

Address: 49 W 45th Street, NY, NY

**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: 3/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MJ Okma

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: SAGE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Juan Carlos Salinas

Address: 161-04 Jamaica Ave.

I represent: Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning

Address: 161-04 Jamaica Avenue

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

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tara Klein

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: UNH

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: 3/11/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Armstrong

Address: 16 Park Avenue, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10017

I represent: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Address: 16 Park Avenue, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10017

**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: 3/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jose Mercado, Chief Financial Officer

Address: 2 Lafayette, 7th Floor

I represent: Department for the Aging

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**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: 3/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Commissioner

Address: 2 Lafayette, 7th Floor

I represent: Department for the Aging

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: 3/14/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Kempner

Address: 40 Worth St. #829, NY, NY 10013

I represent: Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS)

Address: 40 Worth St. #829, NY, NY 10013

**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: 3/14/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy Kaplan

Address: Jefferson Ave Brooklyn 11216

I represent: Encore Community Services

Address: 239 W 49 Street NY, NY 10019



**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: 3/14/23

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Kimberly George

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Project Guardianship

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**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: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Dr. Cynthia Maurer

Address: Visiting Neighbors, Inc

I represent: 3 Washington Square

Address: Village, Suite 1E, NY 10012

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