



**New York City Council
Committee on Aging
Chair Council Member Chin
June 22, 2021**

**Oversight - Serving Seniors in Senior Residences and Communities During
the Pandemic**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LiveOn NY's members include more than 100 community-based nonprofits that provide core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our communities as we age, including senior 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.

With our City on the road to recovery, we are presented with the opportunity to re-envision how we serve older adults in senior residences and throughout our community. The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered the growing need for aging services as well as shined a light on the visible inequities in supporting all New Yorkers as we age.

Senior Residences

While New Yorker's have heard of the stark and heart wrenching realities that took place in nursing homes during the COVID-19 crisis, the dichotomous experiences of independent senior residences has been less explored to date. While loss was a reality across New York, HUD 202s and Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) buildings fared significantly better than one might have feared. The challenges in this relative success were significant, as providers were not only worried about safety, but of ensuring older residents remained fed and avoided social isolation during this time.

The stars in confronting these challenges were not only the non-profit organizations that stepped up to connect older residents with the City's emergency feeding programs, or in other pop-up programs such as LiveOn NY's work with World Central Kitchen, Citymeals, and others, but the Service Coordinators who remained a lifeline for tenants throughout the pandemic. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the availability of service coordinators in buildings saved lives during COVID-19.



Making New York a better place to age

Unfortunately, not all senior residences can afford to hire service coordinators or staff the building to the extent that would be ideal. **As the City looks to become a leader in public health, this, creating a fund for senior residences to hire service coordinators to assist older New Yorkers in the enhanced needs that come with aging in place, is the empirically proven first step in that direction.** Our member, Selfhelp Community Services, has research proving the effectiveness of this investment, as the presence of a service coordinator in buildings, even prior to COVID, meant reduced health care expenditures, namely: lower emergency room use, shorter stays per use, and increased use of primary care services.

Further, as the population ages, it is critical that increasing investments be made by the City to meet demand to combat this crisis-level shortage of housing supply.

Many older New York rely on affordable senior housing with services to comfortably age in place. The need for affordable senior housing with services continues to rise with many older New Yorkers living on fixed incomes that cannot keep up with rising rent cost; experiencing mobility challenges that limit housing options within an aging rental-stock. In 2016, LiveOn NY found that an estimated 200,000 older adults were on waiting lists for housing through the HUD202 program in New York City.

In addition, NYCHA developments also represent one of the few affordable housing options for older adults in our City. Just as the buildings are aging, so are the tenants that occupy them, making the need for quality, safe services in NYCHA paramount to the success of the community.

- **The City must work to continue to increase capital funding for public housing** to support ventilation upgrades and other critical infrastructure improvements that will improve both residential and community space within NYCHA;
- **Increase the supply of affordable housing by investing in the construction and preservation of 8,000 units of affordable housing annually, including 1,000 units with services to be set aside for older New Yorkers.** This recommendation is included in the New York Housing Conference led United 4 Housing Coalition report which lays out numerous goals to equitably address our City's affordable housing crisis.
- **Restore and baseline all one-time funds for NYCHA Social Clubs.** All funding for senior programming in NYCHA community spaces should not rely on one-shot funding from the Administration, but should be sustainably baselined and incorporated into the full scope of DFTA services;



Communities

While strides have been made, particularly with the reopening of senior centers, there is still more to be done. For years, the Department for the Aging (DFTA) remains critically under-resourced, receiving less than half of one percent of the overall City budget, in contrast to the rapidly increasing older adult population.

New York City is entering a critical phase of the recovery, as we progress forward in building a New York for all ages. The City must continue to show its commitment to older adults with critical investments in senior services:

The City should support essential services that include:

- Restoring All City Council Aging Discretionary Funds To FY20 Levels
- Restore and Baseline all Executive One-Time Funds, including funds for NYCHA Senior Centers.
- Use FY21 accruals to cover costs associated with reopening in person senior services as well as \$30 million for HVACs repairs, safety precautions, and Senior Center upgrades.
- \$48 Million Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for essential human services workers, who have been on the frontlines throughout the pandemic.
- \$16.6 million for Home-delivered Meals that would provide \$13.6 million for weekday meals and \$3 million for weekend and holiday meals, both to increase capacity to meet new demand and bring the per-meal rate to the national average.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.