



Making New York a better place to age

**New York City Council
Committee on Housing and Buildings
Chair, Council Member Sanchez**

March 14, 2022

Oversight - Preliminary Budget Hearing - Housing and Buildings

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 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

Even prior to the pandemic, New York was in the grip of a housing crisis that made it difficult for tens of thousands of New Yorkers to find stable housing and make ends meet. Today, more than half of older renters are rent-burdened, as are a third of older homeowners. Further, roughly 2,000 older New Yorkers are living in homeless shelters, a number that is expected to triple by 2030 without significant intervention. LiveOn NY's own research has found that there are more than 200,000 older adults languishing on waiting lists for affordable housing through the HUD 202 program, each waiting for 7-10 years on average for a unit to become available. This challenge is mirrored by the thousands of applications that come flooding in each and every time a new affordable senior housing lottery opens on Housing Connect.

This crisis is particularly acute for older adults as many rely on fixed incomes, making it difficult to afford the rent while other costs rise. Further, much of the City's housing infrastructure is inadequate to accommodate an older adult's health and mobility needs, with 70% of the City's housing stock only navigable by at least one set of stairs. In addition, NYCHA is a well-known provider of affordable housing for low income older adults, and yet in many situations for many older tenants living in NYCHA, their living experience is plagued by poor ventilation systems, broken elevators, leaking roofs, and recurring mold.

It is critical we address this crisis, as New York is aging rapidly and research shows that the majority of older adults would prefer the opportunity age in their community, surrounded by the networks of support built over a lifetime. Moreover, we're *all* aging, and we all have a stake in ensuring there are affordable options to call home throughout the lifecycle.



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Recommendations

LiveOn NY is proud to support the recommendations of the United for Housing Coalition, which includes more than 80 organizations that have come together around a set of bold but attainable recommendations to address the housing crisis in our City.

More specifically, LiveOn NY joins the United for Housing Coalition in calling for a \$4 billion annual investment to fund a comprehensive affordable housing plan.

This \$4 billion capital investment 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.

Further, this investment would build upon the clear success of the City's Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) program, which has created incredible community assets in every borough, including examples such as West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing's (WSFSSH's) Tres Puentes in the Bronx and HANAC's Corona Senior Residences in Queens. These two buildings are clear 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 that were built to the environmentally friendly Passive Housing standards, in addition to offering a new Pre-K on the ground floor.

This capital investment and overall affordable housing plan must also prioritize the preservation of public housing. By investing \$1.5 billion in NYCHA, as part of the larger \$4 billion capital investment, the City will take a serious step towards addressing the capital backlog that plagues these buildings across the City. In addition, this investment must prioritize not only the residential units within NYCHA, but support the community spaces such as Older Adult Centers that too have been harmed from decades of disinvestment.

Notably, the City must also invest in the workforce of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), by hiring new staff required to ensure that affordable housing goals can be met. While the pace of development has only quickened in recent years, hiring freezes and now PEGS have resulted in understaffing at HPD that puts the entirety of our City's affordable housing goals at risk.

Additionally, it is critical that the City prioritize public and institutional land (e.g., hospitals, libraries, etc.) for affordable senior housing. By prioritizing institutional land such as hospitals in



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particular, the City will reflect an understanding of the connections between health and housing, and a commitment to treating housing as the social-determinant of health that it is.

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.

The City must fully fund and implement a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for essential human services workers. Throughout the duration of the pandemic human services workers, including those providing services in affordable housing, have stepped up to provide critical services, from assisting in scheduling vaccination appointments, to combating social isolation. And yet, human services workers are consistently underpaid for their services as a result of City contracts. In order to rectify this, it is vital that these important workers receive a COLA in the FY 23 budget and in subsequent budgets.

Finally, LiveOn NY also encourages our City colleagues to join us in advocating on the State level for the passage of Senate Bill 4547 and Assembly Bill 4854, which seeks to legalize Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). ADU legalization will help address our City's affordable housing crisis, giving homeowners a new source of income, and providing more options for multigenerational families. Older adults especially stand to benefit from the legalization of ADUs, both because it would create more affordable homes, and second because it would allow more seniors to age in place by giving older homeowners the ability to have a live-in caretaker, or more income to pay expenses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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 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.