



Making New York a better place to age

**New York City Council
Committee on Aging
Chair, Council Member Hudson
Committee on Housing and Buildings
Chair, Council Member Sanchez
October 3, 2022**

Oversight - Increasing Affordable Housing for Older New Yorkers and Improving Accessibility in the City's Housing Stock.

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

Firstly, we invite the City to utilize our aging policy agenda, [*Aging is Everyone's Business*](#), released by LiveOn NY in partnership with Hunter College Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, which is a bold policy agenda that provides actionable policy solutions, including housing, to make New York a better, more equitable place to age.

LiveOn NY calls for 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.

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.

Increasing capital funding for public housing to support upgrades throughout NYCHA buildings and improve infrastructure to accommodate older adults. NYCHA is also one of the largest sources of affordable housing for older adults, with 38% of households headed by an adult age 62 or older. However, NYCHA faces its own set of challenges. For one, the current condition of the housing poses a safety risk for older occupants. Poor ventilation systems, broken elevators, leaking roofs, lead paint on the walls, broken locks on the doors, and unattended water damage are just some of the challenges that older tenants continue to face. Further, community-based providers operating Senior Centers in NYCHA are not immune to these challenges, particularly when receiving fines for infrastructure related violations that are wholly out of the provider's control.



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.

LiveOn NY encourages that attention also be paid to improving work order processes initiated by community-based organizations offering services within NYCHA facilities. Community-based organizations operating within NYCHA buildings, such as older adult centers, are critical resources for NYCHA residents and the community at-large. These spaces must also be considered when updating work order processes or should be funded directly to address maintenance concerns considered outside the purview of the authority.

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 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.

Improve the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption “SCRIE.” The ability for seniors and individuals with disabilities living in certain housing types to freeze rents helps to ensure thousands of older New Yorkers will not be priced out of their housing as rents otherwise continue to rise. Despite the strength of this program, it remains underutilized and does not ensure affordability as it caps rents at the period of application, which may already be a place of severe-rent burden for the tenant. To respond to this, LiveOn NY recommends the City continues its strong outreach effort to ensure older adults know about and enroll in SCRIE.

Proposed Legislation

Intro. 676

LiveOn NY supports the intent of Intro. 676, which would require the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to develop a list of universal design principles and require a percentage of dwelling units receiving city financial assistance to be universal design units. 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. This bill is an opportunity to incorporate universal design into dwelling units to ensure housing is accessible for everyone, regardless of age, physical ability or stature. However, LiveOn NY recommends the City gather input from nonprofit community housing providers and ensure adequate funding is allocated to support community-based housing providers with the ability to comply with universal design requirements.



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LiveOn NY supports the intent of Intro. 584, which would require the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to provide tenants with disabilities with information about legal services when such tenants are facing eviction. While this bill is a step forward to address the housing crisis among people living with a disability, we urge the City to work in coordination with community-based organizations with existing housing programs and legal services (ex. The Assigned Counsel Project) that are an additional trusted resource for older New Yorkers and people living with disabilities.

LiveOn NY supports the intent of Intro. 322, which would require the installation in multiple dwellings of certain protective devices for older adults and persons with disability in multiple dwellings. 35.5% of the City's older adult people 65 and older have reported having some form of disability. This is significantly higher than among the population at large, and is a reality that makes certain housing accommodations, such as protective devices including grab bars in the shower, crucial to support the independence of individuals living in the City. Nonetheless, the city should ensure that nonprofit housing providers receive the funding needed for these requirements.

Furthermore, LiveOn NY supports Council Member Caban's Resolution 236 calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, S.5102/A.1475, which would allow municipalities and localities that have a senior citizen rent increase exemption program to establish an automatic enrollment program for eligible seniors to be automatically enrolled or automatically re-enrolled in the program. Currently, LiveOn NY offers a Benefits Outreach Program, which supports hundreds of older New Yorkers in applying for benefits each year. Through this work we recognize the opportunity to address under-utilization of benefits such as SCRIE by removing barriers in the application processes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony provided by Brianna Paden-Williams, Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY For questions, please email bpaden-williams@liveon-ny.org

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.

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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.