



**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



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 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. **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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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

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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.