



Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies



Council of Senior
Centers and Services

Testimony before the New York City Council Aging Committee

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Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2010 Preliminary Budget

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairs Weprin, Arroyo, Mark-Viverito and Councilmembers. This testimony is submitted by the Council of Senior Centers and Services (CSCS), UJA-Federation of New York, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), and the Human Services Council (HSC). Together we represent hundreds of agencies providing social services to New Yorkers in all five boroughs.

In light of the growing older adult population in our City, it is absolutely necessary to maintain, and in many cases, increase funding for the programs and services that allow older New Yorkers to "age in place." In these challenging economic times, we must be keenly aware of how budget reductions impact our communities. Low-income older adults have been negatively impacted by the instability of the economic crisis. Living off of fixed incomes, they are experiencing rising costs of basic necessities; such as food, housing, heat, and transportation. Additionally, seniors who are losing their retirement savings will be unable to replace the monies that they have lost; they will likely be in need of meals and services over time.

We are here to express our shared concerns for the over \$16 million in cuts to the Department for the Aging (DFTA) in the Mayor's preliminary budget. We are greatly concerned that the proposed budget cuts for FY 2010 will harm community-based programs and services, as well as, the poor and vulnerable older adults that are most in need. We will also highlight the over \$22 million in additional funding that we are asking the City Council to restore for Fiscal Year 2010.

We commend the City Council for its vigilant, ongoing support for Aging services, and we know that challenging choices will be made when negotiating this year's City budget.

Restoration of City Council Initiatives

We urge that the City Council maintain its commitment to aging services and older New Yorkers, and strongly advocate for the following services be fully restored in the FY 2010 City budget:

- \$4.55 million in funding for raw foods used to prepare meals served in congregate settings. Our agencies report an increased need for food among older adults; attending senior center congregate lunch programs, at food pantries, as well as a demand for cash assistance to buy groceries or pay rent. (See CSCS report, "Hunger Hurts", at www.cscs-ny.org)
- \$3 million to offset the transportation operating costs incurred by senior centers and other programs for older adults (i.e. insurance, fuel, maintenance of vans).
- \$1.95 million in funding for rent and facility costs at senior centers throughout the city to offset the rising costs that some senior centers pay in rent. Last year this funding was reduced by \$1.75 million.
- \$1.35 million to sustain the Healthy Aging Initiative, allowing senior centers to deliver innovative models of service to meet the emerging health needs of the growing and changing older adult population.
- \$1 million in funding for supportive service programs in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) that did not receive funding through DFTA's RFP process.
- \$5.55 million (\$108,750 per Councilmember) in City Council discretionary funds for aging, as Councilmembers know the needs of older residents in their communities and use these funds to support the programs and services that best meet those needs.
- \$533,000 in Borough President discretionary funds for aging, which fund meals, transportation, case management services, elder abuse prevention programs, social adult day care, caregiver support programs, and enhancements for a variety of other senior services. We also strongly advocate that the full \$7.5 million in Borough President funding remain within their control.

In addition, we support the restoration of \$2.4 million in funding for the *Geriatric Mental Health Initiative*. As you may know, older adults have the lowest utilization rates of mental health services of any age group. One of the biggest reasons behind this is stigma. Last year, the City Council recognized the need for mental health services for older adults and provided \$2.4 million in funding for the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (GMHI). The funding enhanced existing mental health services and has allowed agencies to deliver services to seniors in settings where older adults already feel comfortable and receive other services, such as in their homes or in a senior center.

We would also like to see the City continue to invest in HIV prevention and health literacy education initiatives that focus on the older adult population. The 2006 epidemiology report from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) shows that about 30% of persons living with HIV and AIDS in NYC in 2006 were age 50 or above, compared to 21% in 2001. As advanced medical treatments and medication allow people to live longer and healthier lives, these numbers will continue to grow. Moreover, social stigma and assumptions regarding the elderly, sex, and substance abuse, as well as confusion about HIV symptoms and age-related illness, are factors contributing to the steady increase in new HIV diagnoses among

people age 50 or above in the past five years. In the past three fiscal years, the City Council appropriated \$640,000 each year to address issues related to HIV and AIDS in the context of aging. We thank the leadership of the City Council for this initiative and urge the City Council to continue supporting the collaborative effort between aging and HIV and AIDS service providers in educating older adults about HIV prevention.

Restore the DFTA Program to Eliminate the Gaps (PEGS)

As the City plans for the growing population of older adults, and DFTA undergoes the major restructuring efforts to its Case Management, Meals on Wheels and Senior Center contracts, even with the economic climate being what it is, now is not the time to reduce funding for Aging programs and services.

Senior Center Funding

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget includes a 5% cut, which totals \$5.275 million for Senior Centers. This allocation must be restored to ensure that older adults have continued access to an array of essential services at their centers including meals, health and wellness activities, socialization, and a variety of recreational, arts and cultural programming. Stable funding will enable senior centers to continue operating effectively and efficiently, and ensure that their infrastructure remains intact. Older New Yorkers rely on the many programs and services offered at senior centers which ultimately aid them in remaining in the comfort of their own homes and communities for as long as possible, averting more expensive and premature placement in higher levels of care. We are especially concerned about funding cuts to programs that provide food for older persons. Senior center providers are reporting an increased need for congregate meals, and one senior center has even begun turning seniors away because of lack of meals capacity in their lunch program.

Case Management Funding

We also ask the City Council to restore \$1.12 million for senior case management services. The Mayor's preliminary budget includes a reduction in funding to case management contracts totaling \$1.12 million or 4.5%. As you know, DFTA recently consolidated Case Management contracts from 32 to 23 contracts. Contracted agencies cannot handle this cut when there are 1,200 seniors on waiting lists to be assessed and another 1,000 older adults who are awaiting assignment of a new case manager. We estimate the proposed funding reduction as equating to one case manager per contract.

While the Case Management transition period ended seven months ago, serious problems still remain and are now being carried over to new Home Delivered Meals contracts. Case management is a crucial core service and one of the most critical points of entry into the system of long term care for frail and vulnerable elderly over the age of 60. Holistic, comprehensive case management services are a crucial component to helping seniors age in place. We urge the City to restore this critical funding for vulnerable and frail older adults. In addition, due to the staffing crisis with case management mentioned above, we ask the City to consider utilizing economic stimulus money to fund more case management positions.

Home Delivered Meals Funding

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget includes a reduction of \$1.433 million to DFTA's home delivered meals program. Although DFTA will continue to provide over 4 million home delivered meals annually, the elderly population continues to grow throughout the city and the nation. As DFTA is in the middle of consolidating 97 Home Delivered Meals contracts to 20 contracts citywide, now is not the time to remove funding from this destabilized program. As stated before, our member organizations have reported an increased demand for food throughout this economic downturn; at a minimum, funding for Home Delivered Meals needs to be restored to maintain consistency of meals served throughout the system as much as possible.

Home Delivered Meals providers are experiencing lower than expected service levels, due to referral bottlenecks within the case management system. We are urging DFTA to address this operational issue and would appreciate oversight from the City Council as well.

November FY'09 PEGS

As a result of the November PEGS enacted by the Mayor, the following reductions were sustained throughout the aging services delivery system, impacting many of our member agencies and the seniors they are serving. We urge the City Council to continue questioning the necessity for these program eliminations and to work towards their resurrection. These initiatives must be restored to aid in the maintenance of community-based supports available to the seniors throughout New York City. The elimination of these programs have resulted in a gaps of critical supports throughout the City.

Social Adult Day Care

Funding for vital social adult day care services was eliminated in the amount of \$1.18 million for FY'09 and \$2.36 million for the outyears. We are very concerned that these important programs, designed to assist approximately 450 frail individuals with varying levels of mobility impairments, physical limitations and dementia were defunded. Most of these fragile older individuals and their families are facing a crisis of care as a result of the elimination of the city's financial support for these services. A Queens provider reports that as a result of their lost social adult day funding they have had to cut their staff in half, and are only able to serve one-third of the clients they were serving before. Social adult day services are a far more cost-effective way to care for frail elders than nursing homes. We strongly recommend the restoration of this allocation for some of New York City's most vulnerable adults.

Intergenerational Program Funding

Intergenerational program funding was eliminated in the amount of \$504,000 for FY'09 and \$1 million for the outyears. These programs provided an extensive range of needed services to more than 5,000 New Yorkers and 1,800 young people from pre-school to high school. Elder mentors tutor students in after school programs, work with children of incarcerated parents and conduct prejudice reduction programs in classrooms. And youth gain work experience assisting homebound elders with basic chores. An intergenerational program in Brooklyn has been able to continue their program which matches 80 homebound seniors with 80 youth volunteers for basic chores like food shopping. If the program cannot secure additional funding within the next few months, these older persons, many of whom are truly socially isolated, will lose this lifeline of a program and the regular opportunity for human contact.

Caregiver Support

The City has eliminated \$888,000 in essential caregiver support services which is comprised of city tax levy funding; representing one-third of the funding for this federally funded program. Caregiver support services assist both those caring for an older loved one, and grandparents who have taken on the responsibility of raising a grandchild. As a result of this reduction, programs have reported they have had to reduce their units of service; some by as much as 20%. Additionally, most of the funding reduction was in the area of respite services, the biggest area of need for family caregivers. DFTA's funding for caregiver support services has been vitally important in the following ways: providing assistance with care plan development, linking caregivers with community based organizations and resources, supporting caregivers by offering caregiver trainings, counseling and support groups, and providing respite care services. Without this support, caregivers and frail, older adults will lose a much needed and appreciated resource that enables them to remain living in their homes and communities. With the older adult population on the rise, and the number of caregivers also increasing, restoration of these programs is critical.

Elder Abuse

We thank the City Council for working with DFTA to ensure that Elder Abuse funding was not eliminated; however, we are still keenly aware that this funding stream is not secure considering the challenging economic times. This funding is the foundation of an effective coalition of social service providers, the District Attorney, other legal offices, DFTA, as well as other government agencies. Without funding, this coalition might cease to exist. With 1700 older persons seen annually by the DFTA Elder Abuse provider network, we encourage the City to continue funding Elder Abuse programs in the amount of \$850,000.

Non-Core Services

Seniors have been negatively impacted by the elimination of non-core social services funding in the amount of \$467,000 for FY'09 and \$935,000 for FY'10. Seniors relied heavily on these programs which include information and referral, escort and shopping services. These are the types of programs that are so helpful and essential to the day to day functioning of the senior being able to stay in the comfort of his or her home averting premature placement in institutional settings.

Congregate Services Initiative (CSI)

Funding was eliminated in the amount of \$200,000 for the Congregate Services Initiative (CSI). The CSI funded a variety of educational and recreational services for older New Yorkers. Some examples of services funded through this program include flu shots, hypertension screenings, health education, support groups and socialization activities for seniors. As a result of this funding elimination, one agency had to let go of a program coordinator responsible for overseeing services such as discussion groups, a drop-in center, and health and educational workshops. We urge that this allocation be restored.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to offer this testimony in support of funding restorations for a number of our key programs. Due to the projected growth among older adults throughout the coming years, it is essential that funding for these programs, at a minimum, be maintained. We are committed to working with the Council in any way possible to advocate for adequate resources for essential community based services for older New Yorkers.