



Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies



Testimony before the New York City Council Aging Committee

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Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Chair of the Aging Committee
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Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2010 Executive Budget

May 18, 2009

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 \$18 million in cuts to the Department for the Aging (DFTA) in the Mayor's budget, and the over \$22 million in additional funding that we are asking the City Council to restore for Fiscal Year 2010. We are greatly concerned that the proposed budget cut for FY 2010 will harm community-based programs and services, as well as, the poor and vulnerable older adults that are most in need.

While the challenges of the economic downturn are coupled with the growing need to provide services to older adults we appreciate the new leadership at DFTA. We are pleased that Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli has been able to reverse most of the preliminary funding cuts to Case Management and Home Delivered Meals programs, however, we remain concerned over the existence of waiting lists which undermines the effectiveness of these important programs and the negatively impact the City's frail and homebound older adults. We look forward to working with the Commissioner as she seeks to re-focus the agency, address service delivery issues and find creative ways to design services for older New Yorkers.

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. We urge that the City Council maintain its commitment to aging services and older New Yorkers and work with the Administration to restore the following services in the FY2010 budget:

FUNDING FOR CORE SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF SENIOR CENTERS

We are deeply concerned about the consistent reductions that aging programs have been receiving over the years, and that the FY 2010 Executive budget reflects cuts that further destabilize the City's ability to provide quality, community-based aging services. The cumulative cuts to senior center funding is especially disturbing including cuts to Borough President discretionary funding, City Council funding, DFTA across-the-board reductions and the elimination of the weekend meal program. The re-structuring of the Home Delivered Meals system has also created an \$8 million loss of funding for senior centers.

Borough President's Funding

This \$7.63 million allocation in Borough President discretionary funds support 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 strongly advocate that the full \$7.63 million in Borough President funding remain within their control.

Senior Center Funding

DFTA funded senior center budgets for FY 2010 have been cut by \$5.27 million. Included in this reduction is the elimination of the weekend meal program, and a 5% across the board cut to all DFTA funded senior centers. 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. 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.

Raw Food Costs

This \$4.5 million allocation allows for an increase in raw food and infrastructure costs for DFTA's congregate and home delivered meals programs. 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)

Transportation Operating Costs

\$3 million in funding covers the transportation operating costs incurred by senior centers and other programs for older adults (i.e. insurance, fuel, maintenance of vans).

Space/Equipment Costs

\$1.95 million in funding for rent and facility costs at senior centers throughout the city offsets the rising costs that some senior centers pay in rent. Last year this funding was reduced by \$1.75 million.

AGING SERVICES

We also urge the City Council to restore the following critical services for innovative and essential programming:

Home Delivered Meals Funding

Since the preliminary budget, the administration has partially restored \$872,000 of its own cut to the Home Delivered Meals portfolio; we urge the City to add an additional \$561,000 to make the program whole. 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 consolidated 97 Home Delivered Meals contracts into 20 contracts citywide, now is not the time to limit funding for this 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 fully restored to stabilize these programs.

Home Delivered Meals providers are experiencing lower than expected service levels, due in large part to referral bottlenecks within the case management system. We are urging DFTA to address this operational issue.

City Council Discretionary Funds

\$5.5 million (\$108,750 per Councilmember) in City Council discretionary funds is necessary to support the infrastructure of programs to older adults. With government contracts unable to adequately finance services and growing unmet need, these programmatic dollars serve a vital role in ensuring that the City's older adults have access to quality community-based aging services.

NORC Supportive Service Program

This \$1 million allocation supports 10 existing Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) that did not receive funding through DFTA's RFP process. These programs allow older adults to age within their own home and in their community with the supports needed to promote healthy aging, independence, and community-building through social services, medical services, educational and recreational activities, and volunteer opportunities.

Information & Referral (Extended Services) :

This \$1.5 million allocation funds 8 community-based programs to provide information in the client's respective languages about programs, services, benefits, entitlements and other resources for older adults, such as preventing seniors with dementia from being evicted from their homes, or finding new homes for homeless elderly. These programs have annually provide nearly 400,000 hours of case management services, helping older adults and their families in crisis.

Healthy Aging Initiative:

This \$1.35 million allocation funds 51 programs in senior centers that address the health and wellness needs of older adults by providing exercise classes, health screenings, nutrition education and chronic disease management.

Social Adult Day Care

Funding for vital social adult day care services was eliminated mid-year at the time of the November budget modification in the amount of \$1.18 million for FY'09 and \$2.36 million for the outyears. We are deeply concerned that these critical programs, designed to serve as a lifeline and crucial support to frail, cognitively and/or physically impaired individuals, were defunded. These programs provide essential support to families and caregivers so they may work and have a respite from the daily stress of caregiving. It is estimated that approximately 1,000 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. 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.

Elder Abuse

We thank the City Council for working with DFTA to ensure that Elder Abuse funding was not eliminated at the time of the November budget modification; however, it was not permanently restored for the FY 2010 budget. This funding is the foundation of an effective network of social service providers, the District Attorney, other legal offices, DFTA, as well as other government agencies. Without funding, this network might cease to exist. With 1700 older persons seen annually by the DFTA Elder Abuse provider network, we strongly urge the City to continue funding Elder Abuse programs in the amount of \$850,000.

Geriatric Mental Health Initiative

We support the restoration of \$2.4 million in funding for the *Geriatric Mental Health Initiative*, as administered through the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. 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. For the past 3 years, 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.

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.