



FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT WELFARE AGENCIES

TESTIMONY
Before the
New York City Council Health Committee

Preliminary Budget Proposal Hearing – Fiscal Year 2007-08
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Good afternoon. My name is Esther Lok, and I am the Assistant Director of Policy, Advocacy & Research and the Senior Policy Analyst for HIV & AIDS at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). On behalf of our alliance of more than 300 human service agencies and churches, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

FPWA's diverse membership includes child care centers, after-school programs, adoption and foster care agencies, family support programs, AIDS service organizations, community-based health clinics, Y's and settlement houses. Together, we serve over 2 million New Yorkers every year. For 85 years, FPWA has promoted the social and economic well-being of New York's most vulnerable by strengthening human service organizations and advocating for just public policies.

Today I would like to present to you FPWA's budget priorities in the area of health with a focus on services related to HIV and AIDS and Geriatric Mental Health.

HIV and AIDS

More than 55 agencies in FPWA's membership provide vital HIV and AIDS services that thousands of people living with the virus rely on. FPWA and its member agencies thank the City Council, particularly, members of the Health Committee, for its ongoing support. After 25 years, it is troubling to see that the AIDS epidemic continues to be a threat to many New Yorkers. Most unfortunately, it continues to disproportionately impact communities of color, especially women and youth.

FPWA is pleased to learn that increasing voluntary HIV testing is a priority of the Mayor. **We recommend the Mayor, members of the City Council and Speaker Quinn to provide more resources for community-based organizations that provide HIV and AIDS- related services as well as health clinics to incorporate HIV testing into their existing programs.**

In addition, we have also prepared the following recommendations for you: **First, FPWA urges the City Council to continue supporting the Communities of Color HIV and AIDS Initiative.** In fiscal year 2006-2007, the City Council restored \$1.6 million for the New York City Communities of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition (NYCCOCHAC) and \$1.7 million for faith-based HIV and AIDS prevention. These funds helped to enhance the capacity of existing services and to develop new program initiatives. FPWA urges the City Council to keep its commitment to address the disproportionate impact of HIV and AIDS in communities of color by providing sufficient financial support to sustain services offered by these programs.

Secondly, we ask for your support in preserving and enhancing resources to provide comprehensive legal and supportive services for people living with HIV and AIDS. As a major component of comprehensive support services, legal resources are essential in addressing the variety of needs of people living with HIV and AIDS and to eliminate barriers that prevent them from accessing care and treatment. The recently approved Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Modernization Act set new restrictions on Eligible Metropolitan Areas (EMA) like New York City. For instance, the City is required to use 75% of Title I funds on core medical service only (effective March 1, 2007). This restriction will significantly reduce the availability of services such as subsidies for transportation, assistance for new caregivers, nutrition programs, future care and custody planning and legal services for immigrants. We strongly urge the City Council to protect all these services.

Thirdly, **FPWA recommends allocating \$500,000 to develop an HIV prevention and health literacy education initiative that focuses on the older adult population.** The 2005 epidemiology report from the NYC DOHMH shows that 30% (29,193) of persons living with HIV and AIDS in NYC in 2005 were age 50 or above, compared to 21% in 2001. A recent historic study – Research on Older Adults with HIV (ROAH) – conducted by the AIDS Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA), demonstrates the disheartening fact that this population has been and continues to be largely ignored and marginalized.

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 a steady increase in new HIV diagnoses among people age 50 or above in the past five years. Moreover, as advanced medical treatments and medication allow people to live longer and healthier lives, their numbers will continue to grow. Mainstreaming the needs of the older adult population, regardless of their HIV status, is the first step toward focused primary and secondary HIV prevention.

Your leadership is needed in taking this bold step to address issues related to HIV and AIDS in the context of aging. FPWA urges the City Council to support the collaborative effort between aging and HIV and AIDS service providers in developing a replicable model that may also benefit older adults in other cities in the country. The proposed funds will be used to 1) develop tailored HIV prevention messages that target the older adult population; 2) distribute them to places such as senior centers, housing units, nursing homes, and community-based senior programs; and 3) train staff, volunteers, and peers about HIV/AIDS and aging.

Geriatric Mental Health

FPWA strongly urges the City Council to restore and baseline \$1.7 million for the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative. We also recommend adding \$1.3 million to expand existing programs. Funds will be used to enhance the capacity and strengthen the infrastructure of existing mental health services delivered in nontraditional settings. Funding will help to serve the growing number of seniors in New York City as those aged 65 and older suffering from a mental illness are projected to rise from \$180,000 to \$300,000 by 2030.

In summary, we urge the City Council to invest in proactive solutions that would save the City money in the long run – HIV preventive services focusing on communities of color and the older adult population, legal services for people who affected by HIV and AIDS, and geriatric mental health services in non-traditional settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.