



FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT WELFARE AGENCIES

Testimony Prepared for the
New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Aging
and the
New York State Assembly Committee on Children and Families
Public Hearing on:
“Senior Centers--Funding, Challenges, and Value to the Community”
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Good Morning. My name is Kathy Fitzgibbons and I am the Senior Policy Analyst for Elderly Welfare and Youth Services from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). I would like to thank Assemblyman Dinowitz, the members of the Assembly Committee on Aging and the members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding this hearing on the critical issue of senior centers.

FPWA is a membership organization with a network of human services organizations and churches that operate over 1,100 programs throughout the New York City metro area. Together we serve over 1.5 million low-income New Yorkers of all ages, ethnicities and denominations each year. Among FPWA's membership are 57 agencies that provide services to the elderly in the New York City metro area.

Benefits of Senior Centers within the Communities

Senior centers offer invaluable assistance to some of the city's most frail and vulnerable older adults. Services provided at centers include but are not limited to nutritious meals, mental health services, fitness classes, transportation services, social work assistance and computer classes. Some senior centers also have casework staff on site to help seniors enroll in benefit programs that they need. These benefit programs include enrollment in such services as rental increase exemption programs, Medicaid and food stamps; all which serve as a vital support to seniors. In some instances, caseworkers at centers have advocated and worked to help prevent seniors from being evicted from their apartments. One agency reported their casework staff prevented twelve evictions in just one month.

Senior centers serve as a vital nutritional lifeline for many of its attendees. Some centers, offer breakfast and lunch to seniors. If these meals were no longer available to the elderly who live nearby, we are concerned that these seniors would have nowhere else to go and not enough to eat.

Title XX Proposal

FPWA was instrumental in a variety of advocacy activities throughout the 2010-2011 budget session to ensure Title XX funding for senior centers was preserved. If the change to Title XX funding had been made and funds had been lost, the results for New York City senior centers would have been devastating. A loss of Title XX funding would have forced nearly one-third or over 100 senior centers to close.

Title XX was the funding source which led to the establishment of some of the city's senior centers and funds an array of programs and supports to help the most frail and vulnerable of our senior population. Some of the services funded under Title XX include transportation and social work services. This issue is a priority item for FPWA's legislative agenda for the 2011-2012 budget session and we urge the committee members to oppose any change to the Title XX funding stream which would negatively impact our senior centers.

Cost Effectiveness of Senior Centers and Community-Based Services

Investing in community-based programs, such as senior centers, makes social and economic sense. While accessing community-based services and supports, seniors are able to stay in the comfort of their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Seniors are happiest when they are in their own neighborhoods and able to interact with friends and loved ones. Government in turn spends far less on community-based services than nursing homes. Seniors remaining in their communities and government investing in cost-effective, community-based programs creates a "win-win" situation.

FPWA recently completed a cost benefit analysis, comparing the costs of senior centers to the cost of premature nursing home placement. Upon review with member agency executives, it was determined that the costs for a senior to attend a center for one year is \$1,019 without transportation and \$1,979 per year with transportation as compared to a year of placement in a nursing home which on average costs \$123,420 per client per year.¹

In addition to the cost-effectiveness of the community-based services, our studies showed the importance of the meals served at centers for meeting the USDA requirement of a senior's daily nutritional intake. Proper nutrition leads to a decrease in the mortality rate of older adults. For example, the mortality rate of older adults once discharged from hospitals was 44% among malnourished patients and 18% among adequately nourished patients.² Proper nutrition also decreases the hospitalization costs and lowers the risk of falls. The level of nutritional risk is a significant determinant of falls, as those who are not eating properly run the risk of having brittle bones due to a lack of calcium. Those seniors who suffer from brittle bones are at an increased risk of fractures and other serious injuries when falling.³

Conclusion

The demand for meals at some of our centers continues to grow. This also creates an increased demand for the activities offered at the centers. The upturn in the number of seniors accessing services at senior centers is due to the economic downturn and the growth in the senior population. Due to these factors senior centers need to be preserved now more than ever.

One of our member agencies reports a significant increase in the number of meals served at its centers. Since July they have served an additional 150 new clients which has resulted in an increase of 110 meals per day or 9,500 additional meals served since July over their contracted levels. Another member agency reports seeing an additional ten new clients per week and they are exceeding the number of meals served per day. They report on average serving close to 115-120 meals per day whereas two years ago they were serving 70-80 people per day. A third member has reported a 36% increase in the number of meals served at one of its centers between 2007-2010. These are just some examples of the increases our member agencies are experiencing. Senior centers are vital and are necessary in communities and neighborhoods within close geographic proximity to where our seniors are living. We appreciate your support of senior centers and for having this hearing today on this critical issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Fern Hertzberg, ARC XVI Fort Washington, and operator of a senior center and the New York State Department of Health, "Estimated Average of New York State Nursing Home Rates," http://www.nyhealth.gov/facilities/nursing/estimated_average_rates.htm.

² Voss, Ann; Tootell, Michael and Gussler, Judith; Abbot Laboratories, Malnutrition: A Hidden Cost in Health Care, Economic and Human Costs of Malnutrition, Page 16.

³ Ibid, page 17.