

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON AGING

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March 8, 2024

Start: 1:05 p.m.

Recess: 4:19 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Crystal Hudson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Chris Banks
Darlene Mealy
Lynn C. Schulman
Susan Zhuang

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Adrienne Adams, Speaker
Gale A. Brewer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Commissioner for the
Department for the Aging

Jose Mercado, Chief Financial Officer for the
Department for the Aging

Tara Klein, Deputy Director of Policy and
Advocacy for United Neighborhood Houses

M.J. Okma, Senior Manager for Advocacy and
Government Relations at SAGE

Elizabeth Bird, Director of Public Policy at
Educational Alliance

Jeanette Estima, Director of Policy and Advocacy
at City Meals on Wheels

Kevin Kiprovski, Director of Public Policy at
LiveOnNY

Elisa Mercedes Tustian, Supervising Attorney with
the Senior Law Project at Volunteers of Legal
Service

Barbara Baer, Director of the Home Sharing and
Respite Program at the New York Foundation for
Seniors

Albert Scott, East New York Economic Society

Kimberly George, President of Project
Guardianship

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jolene Boden, Director of Case Management at
Sunnyside Community Services

Dr. Cynthia Maurer, Visiting Neighbors

Sofiya Pidzyraylo, Director at Village View NORC
at University Settlement

Elijah Rameker, Policy Intern at the Asian
American Federation

Kevin Jones, Associate State Director for
Advocacy at AARP New York

Wendell Walters, Manager of Policy and Advocacy
at the Osborne Association

Po-Ling Ng, Director of Senior Services,
Assistant Executive Director at the Chinese-
American Planning Council

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon and
3 welcome to the New York City Preliminary Budget
4 Hearing on Aging.

5 At this time, can everybody please
6 silence your cell phones.

7 If you wish to testify, please come up to
8 the Sergeant-at-Arms' desk to fill out a testimony
9 slip.

10 At this time and going forward, no one is
11 to approach the dais. I repeat, no one is to approach
12 the dais.

13 Chair, we are ready to begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: [GAVEL] Thank you so
15 much and good afternoon. My name is Crystal Hudson,
16 and I serve as Chair of the Committee on Aging.
17 Welcome to the Committee's hearing on the Fiscal 2025
18 Preliminary Budget for the New York City Department
19 for the Aging, also known as NYC Aging. Thank you to
20 Commissioner Cortez Vazquez for joining us today.
21 We're also joined by Council Member Lynn Schulman
22 and, on the Zoom, we have Council Member Susan
23 Zhuang.

24 Following testimony and questions with
25 NYC Aging, we will hear testimony from the public at

2 approximately 3 p.m. Thank you to those older adult
3 advocates and community members who have joined us
4 today. I'll keep my comments here brief and request
5 that the Commissioner keep her oral testimony brief
6 so that we can move on to questions from Council
7 Members.

8 Older adults and the older adult provider
9 network have faced unprecedented challenges in the
10 past few years due to the pandemic and social
11 isolation as well as inflation and the increased cost
12 of living. I look forward to working collaboratively
13 with providers and the administration to help the
14 City's 1.8 million older adults get through this
15 difficult period. NYC Aging has a critical role to
16 play in assessing and meeting the needs of older
17 adults and collaborating with the provider network
18 and the Council to harness best practices and scale
19 innovative approaches.

20 NYC Aging's Fiscal 2025 Preliminary
21 Budget is 485.1 million dollars, 36.7 million dollars
22 less than the Fiscal 2024 adopted budget. Despite
23 serving almost a fifth of the City's population, the
24 Department's budget continues to account for less
25 than one half of 1 percent of the City's overall

2 budget. The Preliminary Plan includes one new need
3 for staffing costs in Fiscal 2024. Across the
4 November and Preliminary Plans, there was a total PEG
5 for NYC Aging of 35.3 million dollars in Fiscal 2024,
6 and a baselined PEG of 17.2 million dollars starting
7 in Fiscal 2025. These are concerning cuts at a time
8 when NYC Aging needs greater resources to conduct its
9 work to serve a growing aging population. NYC Aging's
10 Capital Commitment Plan, the smallest in the City,
11 totals 72.3 million dollars over Fiscals 2024 through
12 2028. The Council funds just over 20 percent of these
13 projects. With over 300 older adult clubs and NORCs
14 now in the New York City Aging Network, this funding
15 is insufficient to properly address all needs. I
16 believe the capital program should be enhanced to
17 help refurbish centers, improve kitchens, and connect
18 older adults to much needed technology and resources.

19 In today's hearing, we would like to get
20 a deeper understanding of NYC Aging's Expense Budget,
21 its Capital Plan, the impact of recent PEGs, how the
22 agency determines utilization for programs, and key
23 agency services and programs including case
24 management, Home-Delivered Meals, and older adult
25 center programs. We would also like to delve into the

2 metrics reported for NYC Aging in the Fiscal 2024
3 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, or PMMR.

4 I'd like to thank the Committee Staff who
5 have helped prepare this hearing, Saiyemul Hamid,
6 Financial Analyst; Julia Haramis, Unit Head;
7 Christopher Pepe, Senior Legislative Counsel; Chloë
8 Rivera, Senior Policy Analyst; Nick Connor, and my
9 Chief-of-Staff Casie Addison and Director of Policy
10 and Budget Initiatives, Andrew Wright.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now turn to
12 testimony from the Administration. Will you please
13 raise your right hand? Our witnesses will be Lorraine
14 Cortes-Vazquez, Commissioner for the Aging, and Jose
15 Mercado, Chief Financial Officer, Department for the
16 Aging.

17 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
18 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
19 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
20 questions?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I do.

22 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Good
25 morning, Chair Hudson, Chair Brannan of the Finance

2 Committee, Members of the Aging and Finance
3 Committees. As you know, I'm Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez.
4 I am the Commissioner of New York City Department for
5 the Aging, known as NYC Aging. I'm joined this
6 morning, as we just been sworn in, Jose Mercado, our
7 Chief Financial Officer. I want to thank you for this
8 opportunity to discuss Aging's Preliminary Budget for
9 Fiscal Year 2025, FY 25. I'm also pleased to be
10 speaking to you today because it's March 8th, which
11 is International Woman's Day. I have the honor of
12 presenting this testimony before a historic number of
13 women in leadership in New York, particularly in the
14 City Council, which for the first time has a majority
15 of women serving in this Chamber and the
16 Administration with a majority of women in leadership
17 and also representing the agency, which serves a
18 client base that the majority of women over the age
19 of 60. Congratulations to all of us on International
20 Women's Day. Good morning, Speaker Adams. In addition
21 to working to eliminate ageism and ensuring the
22 dignity and quality of life of older New Yorkers,
23 providing high-quality services and resources are
24 among our top priorities at NYC Aging. To support
25 this important work, our FY Preliminary Budget, as

2 the Council Chair has stated, is 485 million, of
3 which 347 million is City funds, including
4 allocations for 223 million to support older adult
5 clubs, commonly known as OACs, and 59.6 million for
6 Home-Delivered Meals, all called HDMS, 44.4 million
7 for case management, and 39.5 million to support home
8 care for homebound older adults which are not
9 Medicaid eligible, 14.7 million for NORC programs,
10 8.2 million for caregiver services, and 5.2 million
11 for transportation services.

12 The past Fiscal Year has been challenging
13 for the City financially, and New York Aging has
14 worked to ensure we are prioritizing the needs of
15 older adults and our core services while limiting the
16 impacts of these challenges like the various Programs
17 to Eliminate the Gap, the PEGs. We are pleased to see
18 that under this Executive Budget, there are no
19 mandatory savings exercise and the previous PEGs were
20 implemented without negatively affecting services to
21 older adults. Nonetheless, we are keenly aware of the
22 need for aging services, particularly in core
23 services that are aligned with a community care
24 approach, especially as the number of older adults in
25 New York continues to grow. Because of that, we are

2 working to ensure our state and federal partners
3 share this financial responsibility to aging services
4 in New York City. Despite these past challenges
5 including, as I said earlier, insufficient state and
6 federal funding, we are proud of the work that has
7 been done along with a network of non-profit partners
8 in addressing some notable recent successes. One of
9 those is that in September 23, we celebrated the
10 first-year anniversary of the NYC Cabinet for Older
11 New Yorkers. This effort continues to grow through a
12 project with 24 City agencies and the continued
13 support of the Mayor's commitment to an age-inclusive
14 city and interagency collaboration, which address the
15 needs of older New Yorkers.

16 In the past year, for example, NYPD has
17 rolled out the assignment of older adult liaisons in
18 every precinct and every police service area to
19 better enhance public safety for older adults.
20 Additionally, Cabinet agencies work to create a
21 public service campaign and training for City
22 agencies on elder abuse and ways to recognize when an
23 older adult is being mistreated. These initiatives
24 break down communication silos between older adults,
25 agencies, and also other agencies that serve older

2 New Yorkers, and this is a budget-neutral process
3 that happens through collaboration and the meeting of
4 mutual goals. Another such initiative has been that
5 in August '23 we worked with the Mayor to host a
6 series of older adult town halls at select older
7 adult clubs throughout the City to ensure that older
8 adults got the same access to City services when
9 voicing their concerns about their community. Thus
10 far, we've held nine town halls, covering every
11 borough with the input from City agencies such as
12 DYCD, DOT, HPD, PEU, NYPD, Department of Health and
13 Mental Health, and the Department of Finance as well
14 as the Department of Education, just to name a few.
15 We're excited to continue this kind of community
16 engagement and are planning additional town halls
17 throughout the City. I hope you can join us at some
18 of these.

19 Last summer and into the fall, New York
20 City hosted our first ever Talent is Timeless
21 competition for older adults, where we welcome more
22 than 1,000 older New Yorkers to showcase their
23 artistic, musical, and performance skills. Every OAC
24 had the opportunity to put forth talented older
25 adults who competed at local, regional, and borough-

2 wide competitions. The citywide competition was
3 hosted at the iconic United Palace Theater in
4 Washington Heights, home of the 2023 Tony Awards.
5 That gave older New Yorkers a grand stage to shine.
6 It was a display of talent and joy, but it also
7 showcased that ability is ageless.

8 Additionally, our ongoing efforts to
9 combat ageism is a constant uphill battle. I was
10 happy to write an op ed, which ran in the Queens
11 Towns Ledger, we wish it was in the New York times,
12 the Queens Curia and Noticias New York City regarding
13 the pervasive ageism seen in the current presidential
14 election. We look to the Council for assistance in
15 standing up against ageism, which is the last
16 critical social injustice discrimination with a level
17 of acceptability. We need as many partners as
18 possible to join us as we raise awareness to combat
19 an injustice that affects an individual's self-worth
20 as well as marginalizes an entire population. I
21 implore each of you to raise your voice and write op
22 eds on this critical social injustice discrimination.

23 We're also incredibly grateful, and I've
24 said this over and over again, for the ongoing
25 support of the City Council, which at FY24 awarded

2 New York City Aging over 41.3 million in
3 discretionary funding, allowing us to make even
4 greater investments in often underserved or our
5 unserved communities. I'm going to talk a little bit
6 about one of our signature programs called Home-
7 Delivered Meals. The program is a vital component of
8 New York City's network of services. Home-Delivered
9 Meal programs not only provides meals to homebound
10 older adults, the interaction with the delivery
11 person for many clients may be the only direct human
12 interaction for a day. Support our ongoing efforts to
13 combat social isolation. Again, a critical aspect of
14 our community care approach. This program continues
15 to follow the strict guidelines set by the State and
16 is open to those who meet those criteria.

17 Because financial security remains
18 amongst the most critical needs of older adults and
19 it is highly correlated to food insecurity, NYC Aging
20 is continuously evaluating our efforts and exploring
21 areas for improvement. This includes enhancing meal
22 options for recipients, embracing the diversity of
23 our city by increasing the availability of culturally
24 aligned meals, promoting uniform, high-quality
25 nutrition meals. The current HDM RFP now includes a

2 requirement for halal meals, which is indicative of
3 our goals to further expand NYC Aging's commitment to
4 cultural competency and religious preference. In FY23
5 our network of 14 HDM Home-Delivered Meals providers
6 delivered over 4 million meals to 27.5 million
7 clients. That same year, we were thrilled to have
8 announced a continuing increase in the reimbursement
9 rate for Home-Delivered Meals, something that you
10 fought along with us to get. HDM reimbursement rates
11 went from \$11.78 in Fiscal Year 2023 to \$12.78 in
12 Fiscal Year 2024. Additionally, we are grateful for
13 the partnership of the Council to support an
14 important program by funding 3.1 million dollars to
15 replace 44 especially designated vehicles used to
16 deliver these important meals. These are called
17 hotshot vehicles because they have the ability to
18 keep food warm and hot. We are pleased to report that
19 all 44 hotshot vans have been delivered and are
20 likely, as I am speaking right now, delivering meals
21 to homebound older adults across the five boroughs.
22 We welcome your critical partnership as we explore
23 new options similar to this again this year.

24 I'd like to also raise an ongoing issue
25 which we have spoken about in previous hearings. Last

2 year, we were informed by the New York State New York
3 State Office on Aging that managed long-term care
4 clients, MLTC clients, should receive meals only
5 through their MLTC providers. This was surprising as
6 New York City Aging had been providing Home-Delivered
7 Meals to Medicaid-eligible clients for the past 12-
8 plus years. As Medicaid is a means-tested program,
9 MLTC clients should be receiving meals through those
10 providers rather than HMDM. Since we've learned of
11 that issue, we had identified MLT's clients which
12 were enrolled in the program, totaling 7,000. We were
13 very clear with NYSOFA that we were not going to
14 remove 7,000 HDM client services. Rather, they would
15 have to be grandfathered in, and then we asked them
16 for guidance moving forward for new MLTC clients. We
17 still wait for SOFA to deliver formal guidelines for
18 these older adults, which New York City believes
19 should still be in the HDM program if they qualify.
20 Currently, NYC Aging has identified 2,097 older
21 adults in the MLTC programs who have been deemed
22 ineligible to receive Home-Delivered Meals. Again, we
23 are still waiting for guidance from the State Office
24 on Aging on how to proceed with these cases. I
25 implore you, we implore you, to partner with us as we

2 seek guidance and clarity from the State on this
3 issue. Your voice will amplify the needs of older
4 adults in all of these items and food provision for
5 these vulnerable older adults. I really am looking
6 forward to that partnership.

7 Transportation. During FY23, New York
8 City Aging completed the transportation RFP process
9 and awarded contracts to provide individual and group
10 rides to older adults. That is, for older adults,
11 particularly those in transit desert or mobility
12 issues, can call a transportation provider and be
13 scheduled for a ride to a medical appointment, a
14 bank, a grocery store, pharmacy, or other essential
15 destination. The transportation program is filling a
16 gap in the lives of older adults who have difficulty
17 navigating public transportation in New York City or
18 who have special mobility needs, which require
19 accessible vehicles. In FY24, the transportation
20 program was funded at 5.2 million dollars across 10
21 programs. I would like to note that the
22 transportation program is separate from community-
23 based transportation provided by our network of older
24 adult clubs, many of whom opted to prioritize the
25 transportation needs of their center membership in

2 their RFP submissions and ultimately in this
3 contract. This is meant to be for OAC clients to get
4 to and from their home to the center or have rides as
5 a group to the center for certain outings or an
6 event. Each OAC had the opportunity to include
7 transportation dollars as part of their response to
8 the RFP and ultimately to be included in their
9 contracts. 108 chose to include community
10 transportation services.

11 One of our most critical areas is what
12 I'm going to speak about now. As the number of older
13 adults in New York City continues to grow, it is
14 imperative that we continue to grow the community
15 care support systems, which allows older New Yorkers
16 to remain in the communities that they built and to
17 truly age in place. We do this through homecare and
18 caregiving services, which greatly serve those who
19 are homebound or in need of additional support.

20 Homecare services are provided through Medicaid
21 reimbursement for those who do not qualify for
22 Medicaid through the expanded in-home services, or
23 EISEP program, which case management hours are then
24 reimbursed to programs. Currently, we are advocating
25 to New York State for the inclusion of 55 cents per

2 hour to match EISEP homecare workers which bring them
3 into parity with the Medicare homecare workers who
4 have already received these raises. This leaves EISEP
5 clients at a disadvantage when Medicaid homecare
6 workers are incentivized to take on clients because
7 their pay is higher. There is no distinction between
8 the EISEP or the Medicaid homecare worker. They are
9 primarily women of color. This pay disparity
10 exacerbates inequity because of the source of
11 funding. Currently the homecare program at NYC Aging
12 is funded at the tune of 38.7 million dollars for
13 FY25. This does not include the wage increases to
14 match Medicaid workers. This occurred in previous
15 years, and this was resolved last year in part with
16 the help of the advocates on the Council and our
17 aging network and all of us who were vigorous about
18 making sure that the State had parity in funding for
19 these women of color and that they should not be left
20 out of critical aging services. We prevailed last
21 year. I don't know why it happened again this year.

22 As we know, the pandemic was challenging
23 for everyone, and the strain on unpaid caregivers has
24 been significant. New York City Aging Caregiver
25 Support Program offers support, counseling, training,

2 outreach information to unpaid caregivers. Many older
3 adults are caretakers for their aging parents. Many
4 are caregivers who also have full-time jobs. The
5 Caregiver Program offers support options for respite
6 care through homecare in participation with other
7 services. In (INAUDIBLE), we estimated that there are
8 1.3 million New Yorkers who function as caregivers.
9 Without the support of care for daily living
10 activities, respite care, many of these caregivers do
11 not have the financial means or ability to leave the
12 caregiver in somebody else's care while they take a
13 needed break from their care responsibility. We know
14 that the cost of keeping an older adult in
15 institutional care is far higher when compared to the
16 cost of community care options, such as supporting
17 caregivers. The cost on an average is 160,980 dollars
18 to house an older adult in institutionalized care.
19 Whereas the average cost of community care is roughly
20 between 32,000 dollars per person per year. In FY25,
21 funding for the Caregiver Program is projected to be
22 8.2 million. Caregiver support positively impacts the
23 health and well-being, not only of the older adult,
24 while being also aligned with their cultural
25 background of the individual. This is why community

2 care is so important to the future of older New
3 Yorkers. This integrated service for home assistance,
4 which is care for daily needs such as bathing,
5 cleaning, food prep, shopping, transportation, and
6 meals provision, can keep all older adults in the
7 community longer, which is their desire, and is a
8 shared goal between this Administration and this
9 Council. As many of you know, I have personal
10 experience with this. I have a 94-year-old mother who
11 wants to remain in her home, who wants to go to the
12 church that she's familiar with, to the community in
13 which she lives, to hang out with her friends and her
14 family and surrounding the community that she is. She
15 should have that opportunity. Every older adult
16 should have that opportunity. Many of you on this
17 Council Committee also know that experience
18 personally.

19 In conclusion, I want to say over and
20 over again that I'm proud of the work that NYC Aging
21 is doing, but this work is not our work. This is the
22 work of a provider network in the community who with
23 our resources provide for the greatest need of older
24 adults. This past year has shown where New York City
25 Aging as a whole can look to efficiencies and

2 improvements for our program that truly met the needs
3 of older New Yorkers. The PEG and the PEG exercise
4 was an eye-opener. This mindset has allowed us to
5 weather cost savings exercises, which every agency
6 had to complete. While the financial outlook, even
7 though it's improving, we are continuing to be good
8 stewards of public dollars. While the needs of older
9 adults often outpace resources for aging services, I
10 look forward to continuing to explore ways to match
11 our programs to those increased demands. As always,
12 I'm grateful to you, Chair Hudson, for your
13 partnership and also for your ongoing advocacy. I
14 thank you very much, and I'm going to ask you, we all
15 have to combat ageism.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely. Thank you
17 so much Commissioner, for that testimony. I'd like to
18 acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council
19 Members Chris Banks and Darlene Mealy as well as by
20 Speaker Adrienne Adams, who I'm going to turn to now
21 for her opening remarks.

22 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you so much, Madam
23 Chair. It is wonderful to see you, as always.
24 Commissioner, I'm going to take you up on that op ed

2 business, on that ageism, because I'm feeling that
3 too.

4 Thank you so much for being here, and
5 thank you, Chair Hudson, for leading today's Fiscal
6 Year 2025 Preliminary Budget hearing for the
7 Committee on Aging.

8 Seniors, as I always say, are the jewels
9 of our communities. You've heard me say this a
10 million times, Lorraine. All of us, and the people we
11 love, need care and spaces to age with dignity. Our
12 older adults deserve to live in a community and lead
13 safe and independent lives, and that can only happen
14 if we work to make sure our living spaces are truly
15 accessible, if our older adults have access to food
16 programs, and if our older adult centers have the
17 support they need. I always tell my seniors that I
18 live to be them some day. I was actually in my
19 Rochdale NORC about three days ago in the pouring
20 rain, and I always feel like a rock star when I go
21 through there. They've known me for so many years and
22 they understand how much I love them and hearing
23 though about my Rochdale NORC, it also brought to my
24 attention that we need to get more seniors involved
25 in the NORC because of the services they provide, we

2 had visiting nurse service leadership in our meeting
3 also, and it just drove something home for me, that
4 we just really need to get more seniors engaged and
5 involved in our NORCs and to see what more we can do,
6 and I know that this Council has always been a
7 proponent for NORCs across the entire city and we
8 still are proponents for that. Our seniors, of
9 course, have paved the path for us to be here today,
10 and it's important that we continue to invest in
11 their health and safety to meet their needs.

12 Thank you again, Commissioner, for being
13 here to testify today. I do have a few questions for
14 you and your staff at the appropriate time. Thank
15 you, Madam Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. I do
17 believe that now is the appropriate time.

18 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you, Madam Chair.
19 Let's talk about the Home-Delivered Meals, and you
20 spoke in glowing review about the Home-Delivered
21 Meals. We're looking at a trend, though. The recently
22 released PMMR shows NYC Aging's HDM providers
23 delivered 1.3 million meals to 20,775 homebound older
24 adults during the first four months of Fiscal Year
25 2024. This is just over a 2 percent decrease in the

2 number of meals delivered and a 9 percent decrease in
3 clients served when compared to the same period in
4 Fiscal Year 2023. What were the factors that led to
5 this decline in the beginning of 2024?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you
7 for the question because it is a question that we've
8 been grappling with also. I believe that some of that
9 is attributable to that we're unable now to absorb
10 the clients that we had for the last 12 years, which
11 were those Medicaid-funded clients. Medicaid-funded
12 clients only can get medically required meals through
13 their Medicaid program, and Home-Delivered Meals was
14 a way of supplementing that. The State made us stop
15 that and, as I said, 7,000 had to be grandfathered in
16 so there's over 2,000 of them now, almost 2,100,
17 right now who have been deemed ineligible while we're
18 waiting for this guidance so that is a contributing
19 factor to that to that number disparity. Is there
20 anything else, Jose, that we want to add to that?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There's
22 also a lag in invoicing as well by one month.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The way we
24 look at services is that providers put in the data in
25 the STAR system, soon to be called VIVE, and then we

2 compare that to invoices to make sure that there is
3 parity and we can compare them. If they're not, then
4 we have to go with the invoicing number. If the
5 invoice is late, then we don't have exactly what
6 their latest numbers are.

7 SPEAKER ADAMS: I see. Okay. Would you
8 also attribute the recent years, the trending, NYC
9 Aging was at over 4.5 million in Fiscals 2019 and
10 2020 but the number of meals provided has declined in
11 recent years to between 4 and 4.3 million. Would what
12 you just stated, would that also be the factor of the
13 number of meals trending downward in recent years? Is
14 it all the same thing?

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I would
16 say, for example, we've been looking at this data and
17 we've been seeing, for example, HDM use continue to
18 go up. If we compare 2019 to current 2023 overall,
19 we're basically close to where we ended up in 2019.
20 So actually, if you look at 2019, which was 6.5
21 million meals compared to where we're at right now.
22 It's about trending to where we actually were in
23 2019.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're at 6.1
25 now.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay.

3 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We're
4 going to trend right back close to that number pre-
5 pandemic.

6 SPEAKER ADAMS: All right.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: The
8 Commissioner mentioned as well, our data is missing
9 all the MLTC clients.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All the MLTC
11 clients are also missing.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: In 2019,
13 that information included MLTC clients.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The 6. 5
15 included those that I spoke about.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Currently is there a
17 waitlist for HDMs?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There is no
19 waitlist for HDM other than where I have to then say
20 to someone they can't get Home-Delivered Meals,
21 right? The case management agencies are the point of
22 entry for Home-Delivered Meals so they do a full
23 assessment on an individual. The first assessment is
24 just to just find out what the emergency needs are.
25 If the person is deemed eligible for Home-Delivered

2 Meals and food insecurity is their top issue, they
3 will automatically get a Home-Delivered Meal, and
4 then now we have this other situation, which is the
5 MLTC, which we're not able to and that's where we're
6 at, but there is no waitlist for Home-Delivered
7 Meals.

8 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Thank you. Let's
9 take a look at our Older Adult Center kitchen
10 improvements. I know I've heard from Brooks Senior
11 Center a whole lot on this issue in my District. In
12 our recent conversations with advocates and
13 providers, one of the issues they consistently
14 mention is the lack of reliable equipment in older
15 adult center kitchens. We know that when centers lack
16 fully functional equipment, providers are unable to
17 provide scratch cooking, cooking from scratch, which
18 most of us love to do, and are forced to cater meals,
19 which can be both more expensive and less nutritive.
20 What is NYC Aging doing to address these concerns?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Last year
22 with Council Member Hudson's support, we were able to
23 create five commissary kitchens because we, too, were
24 concerned about the number of providers that were
25 relying on catering so our goal is to make sure that

2 meals are not catered by expensive caterers who then
3 we can't monitor their cooking, the program does, and
4 we can't even monitor their facilities, and so many
5 programs were getting poor performance indicators.
6 What we did was create five commissary kitchens,
7 which are older adult clubs themselves, gave them
8 additional equipment, some of them already had
9 equipment and what we did was expand those kitchens,
10 so that then they could be the caterer of choice from
11 someone who already knows how to do this, and that is
12 what we're doing now, and we are shifting more and
13 more programs. The goal is to shift as many programs
14 out of catering from commercial caterers to these
15 non-profit network provider caterers who can then
16 provide the food. That's what we're looking to do as
17 much as we possibly can. That process sometimes is
18 challenged by, and we're looking at this now,
19 challenged by religiously required meals, right? We
20 might not have a caterer who has the capacity to do
21 that wholesale. Fortunately for us, we have India
22 House that can provide many of the halal food, but
23 that is not the case for some of the other ones, and
24 so that's a challenge that we're looking at right now
25 and making sure that we can have both cultural

2 diversity and religious preferences through this
3 model that we're creating.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Taking a look again
5 at kitchen availability, how much funding is
6 allocated in the expense budget for smaller kitchen-
7 related projects at OACs, the kind that are not
8 eligible for capital funding

9 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We tend
10 to do is, hate to say this, but as they come up, we
11 then look at the need for the specific site and then
12 we fund it based on what current budget they have so
13 we look at really under-spending in each budget and
14 allow them to basically replace refrigerators, ovens,
15 and things of that nature.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's
17 basically a self-funded program.

18 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. All right.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That is not
20 to say that ideally would be to have a plan.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: As to what
23 those kitchen needs are and start forecasting those
24 out but also being realistic that we don't have a pot

2 of money for that so that's why it's a self-funded
3 program at this point.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: It's because of a lack of
5 funding you're saying, Lorraine? I'm reading between
6 the lines.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm saying
8 that it is through current funding availability.

9 SPEAKER ADAMS: Understood. Okay. Let's
10 talk about another one of our favorite subjects,
11 private social adult daycare centers, and I am
12 channeling right now the presence of my former
13 Colleague Margaret Chin of course. This was so
14 important to Margaret, and she often brought up her
15 concerns about the growing number of privately
16 operated social adult daycares during her years on
17 the Council, and the concern still persists with this
18 current Council since Margaret's been out of the
19 Council for three years now, we're still talking
20 about this. Before the pandemic, there were over 300
21 private social adult daycares, and they exceeded the
22 number of New York City Aging's older adult centers,
23 or your OACs. I'm hearing from my Colleagues that
24 private SADCs across the City could be the reason for
25 the reduced utilization we're seeing at some of NYC

2 Aging's older adult centers as they're often very
3 adept at enticing older adults with enhanced services
4 and programs that many NYC Aging OACs are not able to
5 offer them so they are dangling, as Judge Judy says,
6 that shiny red truck in front of our seniors and our
7 seniors, of course, are going for it. This is really
8 concerning to us because we really want to see
9 increased attendance at our NYC Aging Centers. We
10 know that NYC Aging does not have direct oversight of
11 the private SADC programs, but under Local Law 9 of
12 2015, the programs are required to register with NYC
13 Aging. Currently, how many private SADCs have
14 registered with NYC Aging, and has this number been
15 increasing in recent years?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: When we
17 started, thanks to Council Member Margaret Chin, that
18 this was her signature program, she created...

19 SPEAKER ADAMS: Yes, it was.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The
21 Ombudsman program. We registered every older adult
22 daycare center, and then the other thing that we've
23 done is every year they have to register with us, and
24 the longer they take not to register, we impose a
25 higher fee on them so we've been very rigorous

2 because this is revenue for the City. We've been very
3 rigorous in making sure that they are registered and
4 making sure that they're registered for the second
5 year. Do we have the number?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No, we
7 don't, but we can get you that number.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can get
9 that for you, and I can tell you what the process is,
10 and then the numbers that we've imposed fines on, and
11 then the number of investigations that we've also
12 conducted. I commit to you that I'll give that to you
13 right after this hearing.

14 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay, great. Thank you.
15 What's the budget of NYC Aging's SADC Ombudsman
16 Office and what are the goals and responsibilities of
17 this particular office?

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I don't
19 have the actual budget, but we do have a staff of
20 five people. We have three investigators actually go
21 out to the actual centers themselves and make sure
22 that they're actually compliant with specific
23 standards, but we can give you that.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. I guess along these
25 same lines, has NYC Aging's SADC Ombudsman office

2 been receiving any reports or hearing about concerns
3 regarding private SADCs?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes. Yeah,
5 we do.

6 SPEAKER ADAMS: Give us some details on
7 that.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We
9 investigate those and then we turn them over to the
10 State who has authority over those sites and also who
11 then basically adjudicates it.

12 SPEAKER ADAMS: You wouldn't be able to
13 give us any specific details or accounts of?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, I am
15 sorry. We'll try to get it now, but we did not have
16 that information for this hearing.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay. How
18 many SADCs does NYC Aging operate?

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
20 are only, for example, we have contracts with, I
21 believe, nine of them, but they are funded through
22 the City Council. Those are the only ones we have.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, we
24 only have nine.

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2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Just
3 nine, yeah.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Of the 300-
5 and-odd number (INAUDIBLE)

6 SPEAKER ADAMS: And they're contracted?

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.
8 They're contracted with us through discretionary
9 funding.

10 SPEAKER ADAMS: All right.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And modeled
12 programs.

13 SPEAKER ADAMS: Are you considering
14 expanding this?

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: If the
16 Council gives us more money, we would.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: That was a trick question.

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We can
19 give you some numbers right now, if you want. We
20 have, in terms of number of actual transactions for
21 Fiscal Year '24, there's 357 transactions of those
22 registering. Re-registering is actually an additional
23 14. Total of 323. Total collection of fees so far for
24 this year is 108,000. Total accumulation since the

25

2 creation of the unit has been 671,000 so it's
3 actually increasing every year.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And the
6 other thing I wanted to, we submit a local law report
7 to the Council every year that talks not only about
8 the collections but also the investigations, and I
9 will make sure that we can bring you the most current
10 data.

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Really
12 quickly. We get reports every two weeks of actually
13 this program so, as of last week, we had six
14 complaints during last week. We had 17 investigations
15 so it's something we do monitor every two weeks.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: On a regular
17 basis.

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: So we're
19 getting this (INAUDIBLE).

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And we thank
21 Council Member Chin, former, because she was the one
22 that created the office and then added the additional
23 money so that we can go from one staff person to
24 five.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: We miss her a lot. We
3 really do.

4 We really do, though, want to get our
5 seniors back with NYC Aging. We want to keep them
6 there with you. What is NYC Aging doing to improve
7 its OAC Food Program offerings to entice our older
8 adults to return back to our centers?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I believe
10 that we've been in good partnership with our provider
11 partners. Last year we did a campaign Join Us, to
12 bring back people to say that they're safe. We've had
13 a challenge for three years, right? I don't want to
14 keep going back to the pandemic, but every time that
15 there was a new vaccination that came out, people
16 started walking with their feet again, and the
17 concerns elevated, and family members started saying
18 there's safety, and they decide, and so that has
19 always been a constant challenge. We have found that
20 this year, there's been no conversations about new
21 vaccines or new issues so we believe that we would
22 want to do the Join Us campaign again, and everybody
23 has those materials and can use them locally, but I
24 think that was a major driver. We have never seen the

2 results that we have gotten to any other campaign we
3 have had as we did with the Join Us campaign.

4 SPEAKER ADAMS: Wow. Okay. We need to go
5 back.

6 Okay. I think that's going to end my
7 questions for now and just, again, we are really
8 looking to fortify the lives of our seniors. We need
9 them. They are living a lot longer...

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The City
11 needs them.

12 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank goodness, for us to
13 be here with us for as long as they can. The Council,
14 again, will continue to channel Margaret Chin and do
15 the best that we can by our seniors. Thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm so glad
17 that you joined us. We're always in good hands with
18 Council Member Hudson, but you've just elevated this
19 conversation, and I'm deeply grateful for that. That
20 is one way you're combating ageism right now.

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you, Commissioner.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

23 SPEAKER ADAMS: Madam Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
25 Speaker.

2 I just wanted to follow up with a
3 question the Speaker asked about expense budget, but
4 is there a Capital Plan for kitchen upgrades and
5 repairs?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We have
7 money set aside for but, again, we pushed the
8 programs out as a result of different PEG
9 requirements so there is a plan, about two million
10 dollars, with capital...

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Million was it?

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.
13 Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: It's
16 planned. Again, these things are pushed to the
17 outyears.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Would you say that
19 money is, I'm trying to phrase it in a way that I
20 know you'll answer.

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I'll get
22 back to you on that one.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, that was
24 the question.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Would you say that
3 pushing the two million dollars, you said you're
4 pushing it into outyears, right? Would you say that
5 it would be helpful to have access to that capital
6 funding sooner?

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I would
8 say yes but, also, since we actually are not the
9 managing agency, there's also other agencies that
10 need the bandwidth to actually do a lot of the
11 renovations like DDC, EDC, HPD, NYCHA, those are
12 basically the ones who manage and actually do all the
13 renovations.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's the
15 challenge for us around capital.

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Since we
17 don't, like I said, we don't have the capacity to
18 actually do any renovations ourselves. Normally, all
19 that goes to those who actually need the bandwidth.
20 They need the bandwidth.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But certainly having
22 access to the capital funds is...

23 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO:
24 Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. I believe, absolutely,
25 if we have access to it, but I think part of that is

2 also ensuring that our sister and brother agencies
3 have the bandwidth to actually do all the renovations
4 because, again, as there are many projects that have
5 been delayed...

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That have
7 been dormant.

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For many
9 years.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And I would say all
11 of those agencies need funding too.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Correct.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: One thing,
14 what I wanted to say about capital, which one of the
15 ways we addressed it with you with the 44 hotshot
16 vans, was to use it directly, identify what the issue
17 is, and have a uniform approach by giving it directly
18 to the agencies.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's how
21 we did that with the hotshots with you last year.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many
23 providers have made requests for expense or capital
24 funding for kitchen upgrade projects that NYC Aging
25 did not approve?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right
3 offhand, no, but I can look into see which ones.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so you'll
5 follow up with us? For those that you did not
6 approve, it would be good for us to also know why
7 they weren't approved.

8 Do you keep data on how many...

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm sorry,
10 can you say that again? I was writing the other one.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How many providers
12 have made room?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO:
14 (INAUDIBLE) kitchen.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You got it?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you keep
18 data on how many OAC kitchens are currently operating
19 and how many are closed due to repair issues?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes, we do.
21 We have that through our nutritionist. I don't have
22 that number with me, but we do have that through our
23 nutrition reports.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so you can send
25 that as well? The count for each would be great, for

2 how many are closed due to repair issues versus how
3 many are currently operating.

4 Do you know the average cost per scratch-
5 made meal?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
7 it's five dollars. That's pure, just the meal itself,
8 not the actual ancillary cost. That's five dollars
9 for non-catered and eight dollars for catered.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: If we had
11 more non-profit commissaries providing those meals,
12 that would also let us expand the number of meals.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you provide the
14 same reimbursement rate for both?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No. For the
16 non-profit catered meals... (INAUDIBLE)

17 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Catered
18 meals are the same.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, it
20 would be the same.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But it would
23 be kept within the network.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, of course.

25 Okay, so going to OAC PEGs. The November Plan

2 included a 13.5-million-dollar PEG for older adult
3 centers in Fiscal 2027. The Preliminary Plan includes
4 an additional PEG for OACs of 18.9 million in Fiscal
5 2024 and 2.2 million in Fiscal 2025 to 2028. Older
6 adult centers are a vital resource and lifeline for
7 many of our city's older residents, and we're
8 concerned about the impact of a funding reduction on
9 these programs, especially given that the population
10 of older New Yorkers is rising. The City's population
11 of older adults, which currently represents 20
12 percent of our entire population, will grow as the
13 baby boomer generation ages. A 2021 CUNY Graduate
14 Center study reports that the population of adults
15 ages 65 and older in New York State will soar 25
16 percent between 2021 and 2040, compared to just 3
17 percent growth in the general population and, here in
18 the City alone, the number of older adults is
19 expected jump 40 percent by 2040, especially as the
20 Speaker mentioned, people are living longer. How are
21 these PEG amounts determined and how does the agency
22 plan to achieve these savings?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: What I can
24 say to that at this point is with the kind of review
25 that we do on a regular basis, we could identify what

2 are going to be the most pressing needs, and we're
3 talking about 2027. What can be done at that, what we
4 do through that whole process is start looking at
5 what the demands are and negotiate with our partners
6 at OMB to make sure that they are also aware of what
7 the growing needs are. We've gotten a good support
8 and cooperation from them when we've presented to
9 them our needs and the growth patterns so I would
10 assume that, City's financial situation, as it
11 improves, those negotiations are ongoing and that we
12 can also show what those patterns of growth will be.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. How will older
14 adult center capacity be impacted by this funding
15 reduction?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For
17 2024, there's no impact.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, for
19 2024? I thought you were talking about 2027.

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: She's
21 looking at different Fiscal Years.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay.

23 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I'm
24 going to break it down for you.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: In general.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: For 2024,
3 there's no impact on services.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: And 2025
6 as well. Sd same thing to your point in the outyears,
7 that is our concern and that's when we basically
8 will...

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, 2026,
10 2027 is a concern.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. 2026.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 27 and
13 20 out, with the big PEGs are coming in at 13 and so
14 far that's when we'll be advocating for...

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 2027 and beyond is a
16 concern.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right.

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's about
20 13 million.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. If you had a
22 restoration of those funds, how would that impact or
23 reverse the concerns that you have 2027 and beyond.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I would say
25 that we would look at growth patterns, see where the

2 greatest needs are, and make sure that OACs are
3 meeting the needs of that particular growth pattern.
4 What we've always done is map where older adults are
5 moving to and where the population growth is
6 occurring and then match the service needs to that
7 particular area. We know that the growth is happening
8 in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens and in the
9 Midwest Bronx. A borough of Staten Island has been
10 pretty steady so far by all the indications, and
11 borough of Manhattan, it's decreasing.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What about the impact
13 on future RFPs? Will the reduction have an impact?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah. I
15 would assume that they would be. It'll be a
16 conversation about what that growth pattern is and
17 what would be the needs and making sure that we would
18 match those in 2027.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: When will the next
20 RFP for older adult centers be released?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They go
22 through July.

23 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right,
24 so actually they're expiring in December of 2024.
25 That's when they expire. Our goal is to extend them...

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: To extend
3 them...

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Extend
5 them for...

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: For a year.

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For a
8 year.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So that we
10 could then go back to a Fiscal Year rather than a
11 Calendar Year.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: At the
13 same time, to your point, it's basically look at the
14 funding shortfalls and start advocating for
15 additional funding for the RFP.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You would extend them
17 for a year or a half...

18 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: The idea
19 would be, sorry, six months...

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: A calendar year to
21 get you to the fiscal...

22 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Six
23 months. Extend it for six months, and then it will
24 basically be on the Fiscal Year.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: And our
3 goal would be to then, again, do another year
4 extension, if possible, if funding is not available.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. You'll do a
6 year extension after the six months?

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
8 right.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it.

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: From
11 between now and then, we may get the outyears fixed
12 or not, and that's when we'll be looking at this.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What about the impact
14 that the funding reduction will have on the
15 parameters or scope of services in the next RFP.

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I think,
17 for example, it would basically impact the programs,
18 yes, if the funding is not restored.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm lost in
20 the conversation here.

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: She's
22 talking about the outyears.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You're
24 talking about '27?

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Correct.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah. All
3 right.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I mean, well,
5 technically all of the years, but I know you're
6 specifically referring to... yeah.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: '24 and '25...

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You're saying you're
9 good.

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: In '26,
11 we're...

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We feel that
13 there'll be no major impact.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We're
15 good in '26. We're concerned with '27 and '28.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: '27 and beyond, yeah.
17 Okay. Is NYC Aging advocating for the restoration of
18 these PEGs in the Executive Plan?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're always
20 in negotiations with OMB about what our growth is and
21 what our new needs are, and that is a constant
22 conversation with OMB.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But are you
24 explicitly advocating for the restoration of the PEGs
25 based on the growth and your needs?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I would just
3 say that we are constantly advocating for our needs,
4 and so I don't know that I would say that it's for
5 that restoration.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I have plenty
7 more questions, but I know that some of my Colleagues
8 do as well, so I'm going to turn to my Colleagues,
9 and then I'll come back.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: What I don't
11 want to lose in this conversation is that as we start
12 looking at maintaining and growing the network that
13 we have, there are other services that are
14 priorities, right, and we've had this discussion
15 before because as the pattern continues, we need
16 caregiving to increase as more and more older adults
17 age in and need caregiving and their family members
18 need caregiving and then, with that, is there's the
19 companion home care so I think about the network as
20 we know it, but I also think about these priorities
21 and this growing need that we see moving forward.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, fair. Thank
23 you. Council Member Schulman.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you, Chair
3 Hudson, and thank you, Madam Speaker, for your
4 leadership.

5 I want to just piggyback on what you said
6 because you're talking about the needs in the future
7 so I'm going to talk about transportation, which I
8 think is a part of that. Older adults that reside in
9 transportation deserts in Southeast Queens often have
10 difficulty reaching older adult centers.
11 Transportation providers have indicated that lack of
12 funding is the primary reason for this. Last year,
13 New York City Aging modified the terms of its older
14 adult transportation contract, prohibiting trips to
15 older adult centers. This is a concerning change, as
16 New York City Aging had historically allowed non-
17 profit organizations to use the contract to cover the
18 cost of bringing adults to and from centers each day.
19 While only centers in Southeast Queens seem to have
20 been affected thus far, older adults are concerned
21 other transportation providers may face the same
22 issue, and I have some followup to that too, but why
23 did New York City Aging change its policy about the
24 types of trips allowed under older adult
25 transportation contracts?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Two reasons,
3 right? They are transportation deserts and, when
4 those provide, we've never prevented anyone. You have
5 the ability when you have your contract to include
6 transportation services for community-based
7 transportation so we've never prevented anyone from
8 doing that. Of the 300 older adult clubs, 108 opted
9 to put transportation into their programs. That is a
10 local program's choice and, if they see themselves in
11 the transportation desert or many of their members
12 have mobility issues, so we've never prevented that.
13 What we did do, because many programs were just
14 providing that kind of service and not a broader
15 service, meaning group trips and transportation to
16 other facilities for people who were not older adult
17 members also. That's one of the things that we did so
18 to expand transportation services for older adults,
19 not only those who were center members.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: May I continue
21 my train of... Okay, one followup I want to ask to that
22 is, do the centers know they can opt for pulling in
23 those trips?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Sure.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Sure.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Under the
4 current contract..

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 108 chose to
6 do that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Right, no, I
8 understand.

9 Under the current contract terms, what
10 sorts of trips are allowed and prohibited from the
11 transportation contracts?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Say that
13 again.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Under the
15 current contract terms, what sorts of trips are
16 allowed and prohibited from the transportation
17 contracts?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The
19 transportation program. I'll tell you in two seconds.
20 It is trips to medical appointments, to grocery
21 shopping, it is trips to pharmacies, it is trips to
22 other activities and events. There is no prohibited
23 activity. The only thing that is limited, right, and
24 has been quite limited is what I call the portal-to-
25 portal from the senior center to my home to the

2 senior center because those community-based
3 transportation programs, if you're in a desert, are
4 provided by the local service provider.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. What is
6 the current budget for older adult transportation?

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 5.2
8 million dollars.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I'm sorry?

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 5.2
11 million dollars.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, and you
13 had talked about that, Commissioner, in your opening
14 remarks. My question is, so there was a program a
15 couple of years ago, this is really important to me,
16 where older adults could call for transportation for
17 a medical appointment and then that somehow went away
18 because I've gotten complaints from constituents
19 saying they can no longer do that.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There is no
21 reason why they would not call this transportation
22 program and say that they have a medical appointment,
23 and that service would not be available.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. When I get
25 stuff like that, I'm going to..

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely,
3 please.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: How many older
5 adults do you think utilize these services daily, the
6 transportation piece?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Daily
8 average is 249.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, my last
10 question for this is, does demand exceed the level of
11 services available, which goes back to some of the
12 questions we're asking about, do you have enough
13 money for this?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: As we always
15 say, need outpaces our resources.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: We want it on
17 the record. We want to try to be helpful to you and
18 to our older adults. I'm in that category, so this is
19 important to me. All right, that ends my line of
20 questioning for the moment. Thank you, Chair, for
21 indulging.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
23 Member. I know you want to make sure you've got
24 transportation available to you when you need it.

2 I will go to Council Member Banks next
3 for his questions.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I want to find out
5 what's the assistance that's being given to the
6 senior centers that are located in the RAD/PACT
7 takeover NYCHA Development Centers. We know that a
8 lot of them are now being relocated because of the
9 construction work that's going on so I want to know
10 what assistance is being given because I know in one
11 particular center, the Penn Wortman Center, the
12 seniors are actually being relocated into another
13 building, and it's been a back and forth so I want to
14 know what assistance is being given to assist the
15 sponsor of the program.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: One of the
17 things that we've done is we work very closely with
18 NYCHA during this process, right, New York City
19 Housing Authority, during this process and, as you
20 said, what we will do is try to find nearby locations
21 so that we will not have a disruption of service. If
22 it needs a lot of improvement, that just complicates
23 it a little more, but we're in constant relationship
24 with both the provider as well as NYCHA to make sure
25 that there is not a gap in service or a major

2 disruption of services, but that's a process that the
3 City is going through. One of the challenges that we
4 will have, Council Member Banks, that we are
5 experiencing, is the number of facilities that we can
6 house older adult centers in.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: In the situation
8 with Penn Wortman, there is a location that has been
9 found which is an old school that was actually ran by
10 the DOE. Why is that taking so long to move the
11 seniors into that building?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can look
13 into that and get back to you on that one.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Please, because
15 that's been a major issue of contention for the
16 seniors and obviously the sponsor.

17 Also, participation in senior programs,
18 obviously, it's been a major issue, and we've been
19 having dwindling numbers. I want to know, if I may
20 continue Madam Chair, I want to know what's the
21 current budget for the Join Us campaign?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: For this
23 year, we don't have a budget for the Join Us
24 campaign. It is one thing that we're looking at to do
25 again this year.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: There's no budget
3 for...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There's no
5 targeted money for the Join Us campaign.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: So I wouldn't be
7 able to ask my next question. All right. Thank you so
8 much.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, thank
10 you, but I want to just address your issue. One of
11 the growing concerns that we as a City have is
12 finding locations that are adequate for older adult
13 clubs and also for this expansion as we anticipate
14 growth in the future.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: One more question,
16 I just looked at my phone.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Did I just
18 trigger something?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Yeah, you just
20 triggered something. This is pertaining to support
21 for centers when it comes to equipment. There are a
22 lot of centers in my District where we have equipment
23 that is in complete disrepair and there's just been a
24 constant back and forth with the Department of Aging.
25 I can tell you at one particular center, which means

2 it's dear and near to me, the Penn Wortman Center,
3 they've had a stove that has been out, and I've
4 spoken to the sponsor plenty of times and it's like
5 back and forth between NYCHA and now the new
6 contractors or management company that has come in,
7 it's like nobody knows what's going on, so can you
8 edify me, give me some information?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will look
10 into that situation with that particular stove and
11 get right and get back to you, but what I can tell
12 you is as the system stands now and what we had said
13 to both the Chairperson and the Speaker is that
14 usually those kinds of repairs are through the self-
15 funded, it's through accruals and within the entire
16 budget. If there is a particular issue with the
17 stove, and sometimes there is, there's a gas line
18 issue, there's an (INAUDIBLE) issue, which are NYCHA,
19 things outside of our control, I will look and see
20 what is the problem or the delay in the repair or
21 replacement of that particular stove.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: All right, thank
23 you.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's
25 Pennbrook, you said?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Pennbrook, yes.

3 Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
6 Member.

7 On behalf of Council Member Zhuang, I'm
8 going to ask a couple of questions. We don't have
9 quorum any longer so, unfortunately, she can't ask
10 the questions virtually although she is still with
11 us.

12 In recent years, the immigrant older
13 adult population has grown at a faster rate than many
14 other cohorts of older adults. It's critical that
15 this community is adequately informed about the
16 different services provided at NYC Aging. How much
17 does NYC Aging spend on campaigns and outreach aimed
18 at immigrant older adults and in which languages is
19 such outreach conducted?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The way I
21 answer that is that we're really fortunate that all
22 of our services are open to all older adults
23 regardless of status so immigrants and, as a matter
24 of fact, what, 57 percent is the number, 57 percent
25 of older adults are foreign-born, which means that

2 they're immigrant, and our services are conducted in
3 all of the languages required by the City. We focus
4 on eight that are particular to older adults so
5 outreach is a regular effort that we go through for
6 all older adults and attracting them to come into our
7 services. There's no targeted effort for immigrant
8 older adults but, because of the way we provide
9 services in all languages, in all communities, for
10 all individuals, open to all regardless of status,
11 there is no barrier to services for immigrants.

12 The other thing I wanted to say, and it
13 was to answer a little bit of Council Member Banks'
14 question, and now this question is, there's about 2
15 million dollars in advertising services within our
16 OACs so that they can do outreach and inform their
17 community about the services.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. Are there
19 any NYC Aging programs that cater specifically to
20 immigrant older adults? And if so, what? You just
21 answered that, but, if so, what are they and what is
22 the budget for each?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I would say
24 targeted communities. I can give you the budgets for
25 those targeted communities, and we also have programs

2 that are specific to particular communities, like
3 India House and Chinatown Planning Council and
4 (INAUDIBLE) and several programs that are very
5 targeted and most of those populations are also
6 immigrant populations.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you have budget
8 breakdowns for...

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will get
10 you the budget breakdown by ethnically sponsored and
11 then in large immigrant communities.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Great. Thank
13 you.

14 Now switching back to case management,
15 PMMR. The recently released PMMR indicated there was
16 a pause on the intake of new case management clients
17 due to budgetary constraints. This is a vital program
18 that assists older adults in getting connected to
19 needed services and resources. What is the current
20 funding amount for case management in NYC Aging's
21 budget for Fiscal '24, Fiscal '25, and the outyears?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can speak
23 to you about '25, it's 44.4 million. I just want to
24 be...

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, 44.4?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 44.4
3 million.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's for
6 case management, and, as of January, we have about
7 776 clients. For full case management, I just want to
8 be real clear again, and we've had this discussion
9 back and forth over the years. There is no pause in
10 case management. What there is in the process, you
11 get the first telephone assessment to determine what
12 your needs are so every client gets that assessment,
13 so what your emergency needs are, and if your
14 emergency service is Home-Delivered Meals, that gets
15 immediately turned on. Where there is a delay, or
16 it's not even a pause, it is just a process of
17 getting the full assessment for all the other
18 services.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But there are some
20 people who are...

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Waiting for
22 that process.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, and so how
24 long are those people waiting, on average, would you
25 say?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's really
3 decreased over the years because we've put waitlist
4 as a priority. You funded us for a waitlist, and
5 we've put it as a priority. I can get you what the
6 average amount is. I don't have that with me.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, do you know how
8 many people are waiting?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right now,
10 we have 776 people waiting for the full assessment.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Waiting for the full
12 assessment.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Which means
14 that they've already been assessed through the
15 preliminary assessment.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. How are you
17 working with the OMB to address the issue that arose
18 due to budgetary constraints and ensure there are no
19 further, I'm going to call them pauses, I know you're
20 not calling them pauses, but pauses going forward?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right,
22 the pauses. Go ahead. This reminds me of, who is your
23 Fiscal staff person? We would always go back and
24 forth with the definition of waitlist.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Are you thinking of
3 Dan?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Huh?

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, thinking of
6 Dan.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, he's no longer
9 on this Committee, but Saiyemul is your guy now.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, all
11 right. We'll go through that definitional thing
12 again.

13 I'm sorry, I lost the...

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's okay, I'll
15 repeat it. How is NYC Aging working with OMB to
16 address the issue that arose due to budgetary
17 constraints and ensure there are no further pauses
18 going forward? Pauses are my word, not yours.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, no, I
20 got it. As customary, we always talk to OMB about
21 what our pressing needs are and where our gaps in
22 services. We identify there may be some possible gaps
23 in services and work towards getting a new needs
24 package to them.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so is it safe
3 to say you plan to advocate for increased funding for
4 case management?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It would be
6 safe to say that our needs...

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: (INAUDIBLE) saying
8 yes.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: (INAUDIBLE)
10 yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'm going to
12 take the yes.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's part of
14 it's part of our new needs request.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, great. Do you
16 know how much additional funding is needed to
17 adequately meet the level of demand?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think
19 we've asked for, just for case management?

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Correct.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Our new
22 needs is much larger.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Of course.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: For case
3 management, I believe it's somewhere between 6.5
4 million.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Between 6.5 and what?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 7.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And 7. Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And then
9 the companion piece to that is the homecare, but
10 you're not asking me for that.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You can tell me.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We have the
13 homecare and we have the caregiving dollars that
14 we're also.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. What are those
16 amounts?

17 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Give me
18 a minute. I have it in my email.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: What was it?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I have
21 it in my email. Just give me a minute.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You have it in your
23 email?

24 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'll give you a
3 few minutes. We'll come back to that.

4 What's the current case management ratio
5 or the caseload of clients a case manager works with?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I have that.
7 The ratio is, I can't read, you guys are killing me
8 with these little prints. The current ratio is 1 to
9 58, but it can go, it's 1 to 58, 1 social worker to
10 58 clients.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 58 cases, okay.

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: But the
13 optimum is 1 to 65.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right,
16 and the range goes from around 54 to 71, I believe of
17 all of the non-profit agencies that provided.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So 1 to fif... sorry,
19 say the range again for me.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The range
21 goes from 54...

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Uh-huh to 71.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: To 72,
24 sorry.

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: To 72.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah. Okay.

3 You have the other numbers for homecare and
4 caregiving.

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO:

6 Currently for caregiving, we asked for 7 million.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 7 million. Okay.

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For case
9 management, we asked for 6.3. Commissioner was
10 correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 6.3 you said?

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yep.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For
15 transportation, we asked for an additional 604,000
16 dollars.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, can you just
18 move the microphone a little closer?

19 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For
20 transportation, we asked for an additional 604,000
21 dollars.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 604. Okay. And
23 homecare?

24

25

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We
3 didn't ask for homecare because homecare is something
4 they were basically trying to get the State to fund.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: If you
7 heard the testimony, you remember there's the COLA
8 piece that we're trying to get them to fund.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're trying
10 to get the COLA, we're trying to get the salary
11 parity.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But I don't
14 want to be out of order here.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's okay.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But I need
17 to say that, over time, these services are paid,
18 three quarters of all of the aging services, mas o
19 menos, more or less, are funded by City tax levy.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Where we
22 have a real shortfall, I mean a real shortfall that
23 we can see, is in state funding, and we need to
24 really strongly advocate that we get the fair share
25 of our State funding, and we've been at that and

2 we've met with all of our Assembly Members and key
3 State Senators to basically say New York is being
4 shortchanged in terms of, if it was based on
5 population, we would be getting 47 percent of the
6 funding. With those federally designated dollars that
7 come through the State...

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Wait, sorry, you're
9 saying we're only receiving 47 percent?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: State dollars coming
12 through.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They'll
14 dispute and they'll say it's 45 percent. I'll take 45
15 percent.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But what
18 we're receiving is far less than that for the State
19 money. Where the federal money that they just are
20 pass-through, we get our fair share, somewhat of our
21 fair share but, with the State funding itself, we are
22 getting woefully underfunded.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So a lot of
25 our needs also cannot be met. The City has been

2 basically covering all of the costs and the increases
3 for all of the support that we've gotten together and
4 Margaret Chin before you, but we've not seen that
5 same pace of growth in the State funding.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I see. Okay. I will
7 ask you a ton of questions about that offline, but I
8 do have questions about that so I will definitely be
9 giving you a call.

10 But a recurring answer given at various
11 hearings regarding the PEGs imposed by the Mayor is
12 under-utilization. The information my Colleagues and
13 I receive is that there is under-utilization of
14 services and programming, but we have not been
15 provided a lot of specific details on how that's been
16 determined. What is the process and metrics NYC Aging
17 uses to evaluate and determine utilization at older
18 adult centers?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I've been
20 talking about under-utilization, performance under-
21 utilization for the last four and a half years, and
22 the reason for that is because we have found that we
23 leave money within the network for under-performance
24 and under-utilization, and it has gone from 15

2 million in one year to about 46 million in another
3 year.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 46 or 4 to 6?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 46.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right.

8 You guys kill me with these small numbers. In FY19,
9 we left 8 million of unspent funds. That's money in
10 the network. In 2020, it was 20.4 million; 2021, it's
11 19 million; 2022, it was about 56, but there was some
12 stimulus money in there, so we're not going to count
13 that high, but if you're looking at an average of
14 about 20 million dollars of unspent funds, which
15 could be reprogrammed within the network, that is
16 what we're looking to do. It is to take that money,
17 not take it out of the network, but reprogramming it
18 where we see the greatest needs. All of the questions
19 that have been raised, how do we get that stove
20 fixed? How do we get additional meals? How do we get
21 more transportation? We could reprogram that money
22 within the network, and what we're looking at is not
23 one-and-done and not a one-time kind of under-
24 utilizations. We're really looking for historical
25 patterns and then negotiating, and we're going to do

2 that twice a year to look at under-performance
3 patterns so that that money can be reprogrammed back
4 into the network to address some of these growing
5 needs.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, and I think we
7 would all, we, meaning Council Members and also
8 providers, would agree that those funds should be
9 repurposed, but I think they're not being repurposed.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They're not.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, so...

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Because once
13 they're unspent.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, but you're
15 saying that you are advocating for those funds to be
16 repurposed?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We are.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: In your negotiations
19 and conversations...

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're
21 putting in a process where we will reallocate those
22 dollars from a contract to another contractor.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You're saying that
24 process exists, or you're looking at ways to make
25 that happen?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We've never
3 done that.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but you'll be
5 doing it for the next Fiscal Year?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right,
7 right.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'm going to
9 hold you to it as best I can.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And we will
11 give you updates on how it was done, who was
12 affected, and where we are going to redeploy those
13 dollars.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, because...

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I believe
16 this is full transparency.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Totally, and I think
18 that is the best use of funds, that if they're not
19 working in one particular area, shift them to another
20 area that is being overutilized or doesn't have the
21 capacity, but I think what we've seen from the
22 Administration generally is that they see funds that
23 aren't being utilized in one program area or one
24 budget line, and then they just take them out rather

2 than looking at other areas or budget lines that are
3 beyond capacity so I'm glad..

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Our goal is
5 to put it right back in the network, and that is not
6 to say, I want to be clear about this because, you
7 know, we're looking at this as a process, right,
8 right now, and planning it out, but I've been talking
9 to providers about this for four years. I was just
10 saying, I don't know how, we cannot keep doing this.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Because it's
13 hard to ask for new needs when we have this amount of
14 unspent dollars.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Understood.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And so what
17 we're looking at is, and it doesn't mean that once it
18 gets out of your budget, you can't get it back if you
19 don't increase. That'll be part of the calibration,
20 right, but the goal is to put it where it is needed
21 at this particular time.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Just want to
23 acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council
24 Member Brewer.

2 Is the utilization only based on meals
3 served? If not, what else is it based on and are
4 there...

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, we're
6 going to look at all programs.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and are there
8 weights given to the different components?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay. It's
10 not only the meal program, but it's also the
11 recreational and the social service programs that are
12 part of a particular contract.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you.
14 Recreational and social.

15 How often does NYC Aging reallocate
16 resources across its provider network, and you're
17 saying that hasn't happened to date but it will,
18 right?

19 An important component of assessing needs
20 for services going forward is to not only review past
21 utilization but also project future demand. Does NYC
22 Aging do this? If not, why not? If yes, how does it
23 forecast future demand and what assumptions does it
24 use for the expected growth of the older adult

2 population? We've touched on this a little bit, but
3 just for the record.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We do
5 regular mapping of where services are, where older
6 adults are growing, and we try to do expansion in
7 those communities. It's hard to do retractions
8 though, right? Like, for example, I see Council
9 Member Brewer here, for example, let's say that a
10 particular District in Manhattan might be decreasing,
11 another District in Manhattan might be increasing,
12 but it's hard to retract services because there's
13 still a population there that needs them so you have
14 to always look at this from an expansion model rather
15 than a retraction model. Tough.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you and then
17 food reimbursement rates and meals allowed is the
18 next topic I'd like to touch on.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Which one?

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Food reimbursement
21 rates and meals allowed. In recent conversations with
22 advocates and community-based organizations, many
23 have raised concerns with food reimbursement rates
24 and noted they're not receiving a full reimbursement
25 for their cost of providing meals at centers or

2 through Home-Delivered Meals. Additionally, we have
3 heard some concerns about challenges with providing
4 options that appeal to older adults and meet
5 nutritional requirements as a result of NYC Aging's
6 reimbursement rate. What is the current reimbursement
7 rate for meals served at older adult centers and for
8 Home-Delivered Meals.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Home-
10 Delivered Meals is \$12.78 and congregate meals are 8
11 dollars for catering.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes, it was the same
13 we talked about before.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Is NYC Aging
16 considering an increase to meal reimbursement rates?
17 If so, to what and when?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We do an
19 analysis, which is how we've arrived at our rate
20 increases in the past. We look at food costs, for
21 Home-Delivered Meals, we look at gasoline, we look at
22 a ratio of number of staff required to satisfy those
23 number of meals, and then we can come up with a
24 dollar amount for per meal cost.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So safe to say yes,
3 you're always considering an increase to meal
4 reimbursement rates given those factors you just
5 named?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're always
7 evaluating what the costs are to make sure that the
8 cost can be meeting those demands.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The costs are
10 generally always going up.

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For HDM,
12 for example, we were able to successfully to work on
13 getting the dollar increase, right from '23 to '24..

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, on which
15 increase?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: HDM. So
17 HDM went from \$11.78 to \$12.78. That was based on
18 actually looking at the cost so we did that. Now,
19 when we look at OACs, and we mentioned earlier,
20 because there's so much underspending, that's how we,
21 it's self-funded, those costs are being self-funded
22 internally.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

24 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: But,
25 like I said, we do look at them..

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Every year you're
3 saying.

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We look
5 at, like for specifically HDMs, we basically look out
6 for it because, again, it's homebound, and it's
7 easier to track the cost because there never really
8 is a surplus in this program, and so we're basically
9 looking at costs every six months. We send out a
10 survey, look at the cost. We go back and figure out
11 what the total need is and then go from there. OACs,
12 we've done the same thing but, unfortunately, because
13 of the underspending in those areas, we don't
14 actually get an increase in the meal cost but, again,
15 a lot of it's self-funded.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you do any regular
17 surveying or consultation, I would say, with
18 providers to ensure they're able to provide
19 nutritious and culturally competent meals that older
20 adults actually like while keeping within the meal
21 reimbursement limits?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We have a
23 very robust nutritionist unit who works very closely
24 with the OACs around nutritional services, both not
25 only in the preparation of meals, in cost management

2 of meals, but also in terms of cultural competency,
3 and they try to do some comparison of what the
4 nutritional value would be based on what the cultural
5 preference is so there is a robust ongoing
6 communication with our programs and the nutritionist
7 unit.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Does NYC Aging allow
9 older adult centers to provide grab and go meals?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: For those
11 older adult clubs who chose to put grab and go as
12 part of their contract, absolutely, they can do grab
13 and go. Grab and go is not a supplemental meal. It is
14 the meal that an older adult would do.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many
16 or what percentage of centers are providing grab and
17 go meals?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I do have
19 that. Yeah. I can get you that. I'll look for it, but
20 I'll get it. I know I have that.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. While you look
22 for that, how is the number of meals an OAC or HDM
23 provider is able to receive reimbursement for under
24 their contract determined? How do you determine the
25

2 number of meals that an OAC or HDM provider is able
3 to receive reimbursement for in their contract?

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That is part
5 of a contract negotiation process. The provider will
6 indicate what their needs are and, based on the
7 contract and the budget that we agree upon, there's
8 the monetary side and then there's the deliverable
9 side, and that is done through a contract
10 negotiation.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. You have the
12 grab and go?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The number
14 of grab and go?

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Mmhmm.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can't find
17 it. I will get it to you.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. If a provider
19 is seeing demand beyond the permitted number of
20 meals, what's the process they need to go through to
21 request an increase from NYC Aging?

22 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For HDM,
23 we spoke earlier, we do that needs assessment every
24 six months and then basically look at whether there's

2 a need for additional units and that's how we propose
3 it.

4 Now, again, OACs because, again, there's
5 so much surpluses, we then basically allow them to
6 come to us. We tend to look at the OACs around April
7 and look at exactly where their needs are so if
8 someone's actually providing more meals and they
9 don't have the budget, we add additional funding to
10 cover that.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Does
12 NYC Aging allow OAC providers to receive
13 reimbursement for multiple meals a day? For example,
14 breakfast and lunch.

15 There are some contractors that have more
16 than one meal in their budget, and those are
17 available to them by contract.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can get
20 you that. I'm sorry.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Also, not just the
22 number of contractors but also how many meals, if
23 it's two or three.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I want to go
25 back and address grab and go for one second.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sure.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: A lot of our
4 meal policies are dictated by both the state as well
5 as the federal government and the Older Americans
6 Act.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The Older
9 American Act, the mandate is one meal per day, and
10 they're looking at now with the reauthorization of
11 the Older American Act to include grab and go, but
12 they're also limiting the number of grab and go to 25
13 percent so we would have to look at that in terms of
14 our whole network and see what that reflects.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Understood.

16 Thank you.

17 How long does the process of
18 reimbursement typically take for OAC and HDM
19 providers?

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: As soon
21 as they submit their invoices.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We have a
23 payment stellar record of, it's anywhere between 7 to
24 10 days. We have 30 days to reimburse people. The
25 issue for us, as you've heard me say over, is if you

2 submit your invoices with the exception of there are
3 problems or corrections in that invoice. A complete
4 invoice can be reimbursed between 7 to 10 days.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. Just to be
6 fair, a lot of the feedback that we hear about
7 reimbursement is that it is stellar in your agency,
8 so thank you for that at least for paying people on
9 time.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, Jose
11 has a mantra that before I hired him that he said if
12 they did the work they need to be paid on time, and
13 that's one of the things he really lives into that.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I wish the whole City
15 paid as quickly as you all do.

16 How many meals has NYC Aging reimbursed
17 so far in Fiscal 2024, and if you can also tell me
18 how many meals are pending reimbursement. That'd be
19 great.

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right
21 now for OACs, we provide 3 million meals, for HDM we
22 provided 2.1 million meals. That's a six-month...

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, how many for
24 HDM?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For HDM,
3 was 2.1 million meals. This is six-months numbers,
4 these are six months, which is as of January.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: As of December.

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: January.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. January?

8 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: January.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many
10 are pending reimbursement? How many meals are pending
11 reimbursement?

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
13 should be none. You should know, for example..

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great.

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right,
16 what we've done, for example, there's a migration
17 happening between Accelerator and PASSPort. All
18 providers were instructed to submit every single
19 invoice that was outstanding by February.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: All
22 right. So as of right now, there should be no
23 invoices outstanding that came in that we didn't pay.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it.

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
3 may be one or two that we have to reject and send
4 back, but most of them are really discretionary.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I think I know
6 the answer to this already, but I'm going to ask it
7 anyway for the record. Are there scenarios where
8 providers do not receive reimbursement for meals they
9 have served?

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
11 should be none.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There should
13 be none.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
15 should be none. If they submit the invoice in, we
16 will pay it.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: If the
18 invoice matche matches the client data system,
19 there's absolutely no and there's no discretion, or
20 if it doesn't calibrate, then there's a question, but
21 other than that, there should be none.

22 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We do,
23 like the Commissioner said, we do pride ourselves in
24 ensuring payments are made on time. We do look at
25 every month to find out who's outstanding in

2 invoices. We then go and follow them constantly.
3 That's the first phase. The second phase is we have
4 to have program officers who then follow up on top of
5 that. We generate a list every month, normally
6 there's usually about 10 to 12 of them, and we
7 constantly track them down to make sure that they
8 submit their invoices. We've had some providers that
9 were outstanding for four or five invoices, and we
10 just kept following and following so that's what
11 we're doing.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And that
13 goes back to the earlier issue of leaving no money on
14 the table so that we can reprogram it.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it. All right,
16 switching topics now again. The Preliminary Plan
17 includes an additional 1.2 million dollars in Fiscal
18 2024 for personal services expenditures. How many
19 positions does this funding relate to, and are the
20 positions currently filled?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Our head
22 count is 332, and we have 22 vacancies at this
23 moment.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 332 with 22
25 vacancies.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: With 22
3 vacancies, yeah, and the vacancies are at different
4 stages of recruitment.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Of hiring and
6 everything, okay. Let me just be a little bit more
7 specific because the numbers you gave me were for the
8 whole agency, correct?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. The Preliminary
11 Plan includes an additional 1.2 million in Fiscal
12 '24. Do you know how many positions that 1.2 million?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Those
14 are the 15, yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 15 positions.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And are those
18 positions currently filled?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Most of them
20 are.

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Mostly, or?

23 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes,
24 they are. Yes.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes, they are filled?
3 Okay.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think we
5 have two vacancies in program officers.

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah.

9 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: In which areas or
11 programs were the funds added?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They really
13 are across the board.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: They're across the
15 board, throughout the agency?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah,
17 throughout the agency.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Maybe you can
19 just follow up with the specifics for us. And there
20 is no headcount added with this funding. Do you know
21 why? Is the budgeted headcount already included in
22 the baseline?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I believe
24 so.

25

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No. This
3 is the 15 that come in, the 15 that go out, then we
4 go back to OMB and ask for the 15 every year so we
5 had the funding (INAUDIBLE)

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: This was
7 part of our growth in 2020 or 2021, and these 15
8 positions were allocated and they get funded for a
9 particular period.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And we
12 believe that they will continue as part of our
13 negotiations with OMB.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do any of these
15 positions relate to staff tasked with administering
16 contracts?

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Most of our
18 staff goes through program officers and things of
19 that nature. All of these were related to the growth
20 in the OACs and the contract management process, if
21 that's the question, if I'm understanding the
22 question correctly.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, just whether
24 they're tasked with administering contracts or not.

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We'll
3 get you the list, like you mentioned.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. This goes back
5 to your earlier point about having to ask, 15 in, 15
6 out, always having to ask for the 15 since they're
7 not baseline, but how do you plan to keep these
8 positions in the outyears since the funding was only
9 added in one year?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I have
11 confidence in the contract and the negotiations with
12 OMB.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so you're
14 relying on OMB.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I believe
16 that OMB knows the growth and the need of this agency
17 and they've honored it all along and I have
18 confidence in that.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you think we
20 can get OMB to baseline those positions?

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They have to
22 look at it as part of a total package, I'm sure.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, but I mean if
24 they're giving you the money for it year after year,
25 I would assume.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's a
3 possibility.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, okay. The
5 Preliminary Plan also includes a rollover of 651,690
6 dollars and unspent federal dollars from Fiscal '23
7 to Fiscal '24 for the Silver Corps program. What is
8 the total budget for the Silver Corps program in
9 Fiscal '24 and then Fiscal '25 and the outyears.

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I will
11 get back to you on that because it varies from year
12 to year.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you know the
14 funding sources for the program?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: AmeriCorps.
16 Federal.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Why was there unspent
18 funding in Fiscal '23?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It was a
20 startup year.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Startup? Do you know
22 the total capacity or number of slots for the Silver
23 Corps program and how many older adults are currently
24 enrolled and whether there's a waiting list?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The three-
3 year goal is 250, and we're currently at 89.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, you said 250
5 or 350?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 250.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 250, and you're
8 currently at 89.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right, and
10 the program has two components. One is the voluntary
11 component and one is the training and certification
12 component.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know of the 89
14 where they fall in those two programs?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The 89 is in
16 the certification process, and we're looking to place
17 them in their volunteer positions right now.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So no volunteers?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Some of them
20 have been, but the lion's share is in the
21 certification and training process.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'm going to
23 jump to OAC attendance. In discussions with providers
24 as well as some of my Colleagues, I understand
25 there's very little consistency when it comes to the

2 sign-in policy across OACs. I've heard that at some
3 older centers, older adults are required to sign in
4 only when they receive a meal, while at other centers
5 they are required to sign in when they arrive at the
6 center and when they participate in each activity.
7 What is NYC Aging's official policy on tracking
8 center attendance?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Every older
10 adult who comes into a center is to be signed in.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So when they walk
12 through the door?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: When they
14 walk through the door. They might have an additional
15 sign-in, because they report that for activities, but
16 as they walk in through the door and many centers
17 have a scanner that they also use as..

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many
19 centers have that scanner?

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I don't know
21 that right now. I'll get that to you. I don't know
22 how many.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you require
24 providers to maintain sign-in sheets for overall
25 attendance?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's the
3 sign-in sheet or the scanner, right.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But that's a
5 requirement? Okay. Do you require attendance for
6 specific classes or services or is the only
7 requirement if the person is coming through the door?

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The program
9 has the responsibility to then come up with a process
10 to indicate how many people are participating in
11 those other activities.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so you leave it
13 up to each center. How does this information factor
14 into determining utilization at older adult centers?

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: This
16 information goes into what is currently called the
17 STAR System, which is a client-based data system,
18 which indicates each client and the services that
19 they receive. That is being migrated now into a
20 system called Vive which is, again, it'll be a client
21 data system that the program then reports to us on a
22 regular basis how many people are participating and
23 what services they are participating in.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Is there any
3 reason how might you account for the inconsistency
4 across different locations for how folks are..

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I don't
6 think of it as an inconsistency. People have
7 different practices. We know what the standards are.
8 We inform you how you are to report to us that
9 clients are coming. You have to have a data
10 collection system that has integrity and that then
11 it's used to be reported into the main client data
12 system. How you, as a contractor, choose to operate
13 your business, we give you guidelines, we give you
14 some best practices, but how you implement that is up
15 to you. All right. We keep going back to we can't
16 tell you exactly what to do, how to do it. That's why
17 you have a contract.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Going back to
19 the Capital Plan, if I may.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The what
21 plan?

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Capital.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, the
24 capital. Oh, that's Jose.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know the
3 rationale for the decrease in the Capital Plan from
4 80.3 million to 72.3 million?

5 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Part of
6 that is basically the PEG targets.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know any
8 significant projects that were impacted and whether
9 they were reduced, eliminated, or rolled into the
10 outyears of the plan?

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: There
12 are a lot of projects that we just pushed into
13 outyears.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Outyears, okay. How
15 are you prioritizing capital needs requests?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: I think,
17 for example, as they come to us, we look at which,
18 that's the list we're going to get you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: That's
21 we're going to get you. We'll let you know which one.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But for us,
23 it's physical plant and anything that prevents
24 provision of services. That's how we would
25 prioritize. It's health and safety.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Have you received any
3 guidance from OMB on modifying and managing your
4 Capital Plan or on handling capital needs requests?

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I would say
6 that, and this is an overarching statement, but the
7 relationship with OMB is one that is very productive
8 and we do workshop issues together. They're an
9 oversight agency, but they're also a partner in
10 helping ensure that our service needs are met
11 including capital.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Then your Fiscal '25
13 Preliminary Capital Plan includes a 3-million-dollar
14 commitment in Fiscal '25 for the New York Change
15 Project. The total funding across Fiscals '24 to '28
16 is 7.3 million. Can you provide us details as to the
17 scope and timeline of this capital project.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: This is a
19 longstanding issue that was funded multiple years ago
20 by Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, and it is
21 still an issue that we rely on our sister agency,
22 DCC, to implement this, and that's the process that
23 we're going through right now. This was a project to
24 install an elevator. It was then impacted by..

25 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: One elevator?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: An elevator,
3 and to fix the first floor, and then it was impacted
4 by one of the hurricanes, I can't remember if it was
5 Sandy or one of those that had compromised the
6 foundation even further.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I see.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So it's just
9 become a complicated piece, and it's been on the
10 books since Melissa Mark-Viverito was Council Member.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but that money
12 is with DDC or with you all?

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It is with
14 DDC. They're the ones who actually.

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We have
16 a capital budget, but it's all managed by someone
17 else.

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right, of
19 course, it's managed by someone else.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you know,
21 what location is the elevator on the first floor?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's the
23 109th Street location.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: It's at an OAC at
25 109th Street?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: On 109th
5 between (INAUDIBLE)

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Are they currently
7 able to get to the upper floors of that facility?

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There is an
9 elevator there now.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so it's to
11 upgrade or fix the elevator?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, I
13 think it was to upgrade it.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, headcount and
15 vacancies. As of January 2024, NYC Aging had a 9.3
16 percent vacancy rate with approximately 37 positions
17 vacant. It was announced on February 21, 2024, that
18 the Mayor is canceling the PEG for the Executive Plan
19 and "the Administration is moving from a near full
20 hiring freeze to a two-for-one model and easing
21 other-than-personal services or OTPS freeze
22 restrictions." Does the agency have adequate
23 headcount to effectively run all of its programs and
24 initiatives?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It's a
3 negotiation with OMB, and that's one of the results
4 of that is the 15 positions that we asked for because
5 of growth and which they have honored.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and let me
7 just, you said before you have 22 vacancies agency-
8 wide, right?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right, 22
10 vacancies.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Under the
12 hiring freeze, how many positions at NYC Aging were
13 exempt and why?

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: The only
15 ones that are exempt are grant-funded positions.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Sorry, what was that?

17 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: The only
18 positions that are exempt from the hiring freeze are
19 grant positions.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Oh, grant positions.
21 Got you. Given the updated guidance from the Mayor,
22 what is the expected impact on your ability to hire
23 new staff?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think
25 labor challenges are across the City so I think we

2 are figuring out ways to have our best recruitment
3 and spread our word as much as possible.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but for some of
5 those 22 positions, you said like you are in the
6 hiring process for some of them, right?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Can you share
9 the specific areas or programs where those vacancies
10 exist?

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can
12 provide that for you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And I can
15 also tell you where it is in the hiring process.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. That would be
17 great, and then are there priority positions that
18 you're most focused on hiring for?

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Always in
20 the program officer position is one and nutritionist
21 positions, but program officers, whether they're for
22 older adult clubs or for the social service arena.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Great. Moving
24 on to end of federal pandemic funding. The expiration
25 of federal pandemic-related funding is an area of

2 concern, especially if the City does not find other
3 funding to replace it. In NYC Aging's Preliminary
4 Plan for Fiscal '24, there's 44.4 million budgeted in
5 pandemic budget codes and, for Fiscal '25, there's
6 68.2 million in such codes. Additionally, the
7 Preliminary Plan reflects funding and pandemic codes
8 of 4.3 million in Fiscals '26 and '27. What services
9 or programs are being supported by this pandemic
10 funding?

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: A lot of
12 the pandemic funding is being replaced by City
13 funding.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Do you know how
15 much of it? How much is a lot?

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We have,
17 for example, we have funding in HDM that's being
18 replaced by City funding. We also have funding in the
19 NORCs that's being replaced by City funding. We also
20 have some funding in the OACs that's also being
21 replaced by City funding.

22 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. It's our
23 understanding that all federal pandemic-related
24 funding must be used by the end of the current
25 calendar year. Is that correct?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: That's
3 correct. That's the reason why a lot of our funding
4 is being switched. That's why. So that's happened
5 actually in November Plan. I think it is, or Jan, I
6 think it's Jan or November, I can't remember right
7 now top of the head, but that's the switch that's
8 been happening.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you expect to use
10 all of your budgeted pandemic-related funding within
11 the applicable timeframe?

12 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For July
13 through December, that's when we actually, all that
14 money's been spent.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: And it's been spent.

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right,
17 and that's where the tax levy has been switched off.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Got it. What's the
19 source of the budgeted pandemic funding in the
20 outyears? You said City tax levy?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
22 it's all being replaced by City tax levy because a
23 lot of it expires.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and it's being
25 used for all the same things, same purposes?

2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yep.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How are you dealing
4 with the fiscal cliff caused by the expiration of
5 this funding?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: A lot of
7 it's being worked on with OMB (INAUDIBLE) to
8 basically find City tax levy.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, and it sounds
10 like you're not really concerned that any services
11 would need to be reduced, right? Everything has been
12 replaced dollar-for-dollar?

13 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Dollar
14 for dollar, yeah, except for the outyear PEGs, which
15 we discussed earlier.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. Okay. The NYC
17 Aging Term and Condition report provided to the
18 Council for the period of July 1st through December
19 31st showed a waitlist of 322 people for homecare and
20 774 for case management. Why are there waitlists for
21 these programs? I understand that for case
22 management.

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: One of the
24 challenges we have in homecare, there's two
25 challenges. One is the paucity of homecare workers

2 that has been exacerbated by this difference in
3 salary imposed on us by the State where they're
4 funding EISEP homecare workers at a much lower rate
5 than Medicare homecare workers, and that disparity
6 causes competition in recruiting staff. Homecare is
7 all labor driven.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Is there anything
9 that you can do to solve for that?

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're
11 advocating strongly with the State to eliminate that
12 disparity in salaries for the same class of people.
13 We hope that you will join us in lifting your voices
14 on that.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And the
17 other thing that we're doing is being very aggressive
18 about our recruitment.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How many additional
20 case workers and how much additional funding do you
21 think is needed to eliminate the case management
22 waitlist?

23 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: We'll
24 get back to you on the actual numbers.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. You've talked
3 already about the...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I have a
5 list of all the things we're going to get back to
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. In the November
8 Plan, there's an addition of 164,000 in State funding
9 added to NYC Aging's budget for a single position
10 relating to the City's asylum-seeker effort. The
11 position and funding were added in Fiscal '24 and
12 Fiscal '25. Can you tell us the title and
13 responsibilities of that position?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That was a
15 position that we had on loan and that position has
16 been restored back to the Department for the Aging.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You're saying that
18 the position that was allocated specifically for the
19 asylum-seeker effort...

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Was a loan
21 position that has been restored to the Department for
22 the Aging.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Meaning the original
24 intended purpose is no longer valid.

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It being met
3 by another agency, not the Department for the Aging.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, but you still
5 have that 164,000 dollars...

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We have that
7 position and that headcount.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: It's yours now. Okay,
9 so that position will report to somebody in NYC Aging
10 and no longer have anything to do with the asylum
11 seeker.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That is
13 correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Thank you. The
15 proposed State Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget
16 released in January included an increased investment
17 in the New York State Office for the Aging funding of
18 approximately 40 million dollars. If this proposal is
19 enacted, how does NYC Aging anticipate this
20 investment will impact the agency?

21 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: You're
22 talking about the state budget, correct?

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yes. The proposed
24 State Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget that was
25 released in January included an increased investment

2 in the New York State Office for the Aging funding of
3 approximately 40 million. If the proposal is enacted,
4 how do you anticipate NYC Aging will be impacted? Are
5 you going to receive any of the funding from the
6 State if that happens?

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We hope that
8 they give us our fair share of that 40 million
9 dollars, and that is what we constantly advocate for.

10 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Were there any other
11 proposals in the Governor's Budget that NYC Aging
12 expects will impact the agency, either positively or
13 negatively?

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Negatively.
15 It's the disparity with the homecare worker salary.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The other
18 issue is with the MLTC Home-Delivered Meals.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Just going back
20 to the older adult transportation quickly, I just
21 have a couple of questions to piggyback off of what
22 Council Member Schulman asked. Do you have any plans
23 to improve older adult transportation, especially in
24 communities where transportation options are limited?

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I don't want
3 to answer that with an overarching response.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, because you had
5 mentioned before that only 108...

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 108.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Out of the 300.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: If more
9 programs identify that as an issue area that they
10 would like to do services and, as we're doing this
11 revisioning and reprogramming of under-utilized
12 dollars, it's something that we would consider.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The issue
15 with transportation is that there's a capital
16 component to that, and we would look to you to help
17 support local communities with the vehicles. The
18 transportation service, the key part there is the
19 vehicles.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Under the current
21 terms, what sort of trips are exempt from the
22 transportation contracts?

23 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think I
24 answered that. The transportation model that was
25 employed was to make sure that you were able to have

2 transportation to other than portal-to-portal, right?

3 The portal-to-portal, meaning the local

4 transportation needs would be handled by a local OAC

5 who's identify transportation as a critical issue for

6 their community.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Do you know how many

8 older adults utilize the services daily?

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 248, we

10 said.

11 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: 249.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 249.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: 249. Okay. Do you

14 think that demand exceeds the level of services

15 available?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely.

17 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah?

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Particularly

19 in transportation deserts like Queens and Brooklyn

20 and parts of the Bronx.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: How much additional

22 funding do you think would be needed to meet the

23 demand?

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We can get

25 back to you on that.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I just want
4 to say that it is, and you've heard me say this
5 before, but it is an honest statement that it is a
6 constant and very productive partnership with OMB,
7 looking at new needs and things of that nature.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I'm glad to hear
9 that. Every time I speak with OMB, I impress upon
10 them the need to ensure that they're funding NYC
11 Aging, especially given the population increase. I
12 think anybody who's looking at those numbers would
13 want to be certain that an agency like yours is fully
14 funded, restored, and even expanded to actually match
15 the growing population, so I trust that it is
16 fruitful.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I believe it
18 is because the negotiations and the conversations are
19 very productive and really in the spirit of
20 recognizing that the need exists.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I want to just touch
22 on the Grandparent Resource Center for a second
23 because I heard from a lot of constituents in my
24 District in particular, but we've heard from many
25 older adults across the board that the Grandparent

2 Resource Center was a very valuable and useful
3 resource for them and it was ended, and many older
4 adults are curious about the future so can you tell
5 us why the program was eliminated?

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The program
7 was ended because of low utilization for its intended
8 purpose, which was kinship care so it was very low
9 utilization in that area, and what we've done now is
10 added that to some of our caregiving programs, and
11 I'm going to get you some later on more of the
12 details on that so I can give you a robust picture,
13 but what we've done is that we've built in kinship
14 care part of training for many more of our caregiving
15 programs so that we could then expand the capacity of
16 kinship care and knowledge of kinship care across the
17 board so it was a difficult decision, but it was
18 based on utilization.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, so is it safe
20 to say that you don't plan to restore that program,
21 but that there are alternatives?

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Those
23 services...

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Are still available?
25

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Services
3 through our caregiving program, and I can get you
4 exactly how we've done that and what we've seen as
5 the results of that.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, it would be
7 great to get that because I'm also curious to know
8 how that's being communicated to the people who are
9 in the program.

10 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: It has been
11 a communication challenge for us because we've
12 expressed that, and we have not heard for about a
13 year and a half now, maybe a year, of any services
14 that have been unattended to or needed since we've
15 done this other expansion and other training so I'm
16 curious about that so I will look into that, but I'll
17 tell you exactly how we address that and what the
18 impact of that has been.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'll follow up
20 with you also directly because...

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, I
22 (INAUDIBLE) specifics.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, we had some
24 specific issues in our District, and I believe we
25 reached out to your office.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I don't know where
4 that landed so I'll follow up and reach out.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. NYC Aging co-
7 chaired the Compassion and Assistance for Returning
8 Elders, or CARE, task force that was created by
9 Council legislation before the pandemic. Has NYC
10 Aging acted on any recommendations that this task
11 force generated?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm not sure
13 I know.

14 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Sorry,
15 what was the question again?

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The City Council
17 enacted legislation that created a Compassionate
18 Assistance for Returning Elders, or CARE, task force
19 before the pandemic, and so I'm just wondering if
20 you've acted on any recommendations that the task
21 force generated.

22 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You know
23 what, Council Member, I'm going to have to get back
24 to you on that because I have no knowledge of that
25 program or that initiative.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. I'm just going
3 to touch on incarcerated and formerly incarcerated
4 older adults for a second. Due to the impact of
5 incarceration, adults in prison are considered older
6 adults when they are aged 50 and up. Yet most of NYC
7 Aging services starts at age 60, and I know that's
8 also federally mandated, but what would it take
9 programmatic programmatically or fiscally for NYC
10 Aging to extend services to formerly incarcerated
11 older adults who are between 50 and 59 years old?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The
13 conversation we would have to have with MOCJ, with
14 the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, to see what
15 kind of gap services can be provided. It's an issue
16 that is raised more and more, particularly with the
17 conversation that if you've been incarcerated, even
18 though you're 50, chronologically, you're not 50 in
19 every other sense of the word, so that you're really
20 aged in, and it's a conversation that we really need
21 to look at, and it's also a conversation for advocacy
22 at the federal level.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely. The
24 Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, which I know is one of
25 your favorite...

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Which one?

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Cabinet for Older New
4 Yorkers. One of your favorite topics.

5 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I hear that
6 you're going to have a hearing on that.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah. Absolutely.

8 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I'm excited.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: The Cabinet for Older
10 New Yorkers has been mentioned in many of our
11 Committee hearings, including the recent oversight
12 hearing on immigrant older adults that was held
13 jointly with the Committee on Immigration. What
14 agencies are members of the Cabinet and how often
15 does it meet?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The Cabinet
17 meets quarterly, the principals, that means the
18 Commissioners of the 24 agencies and I believe that
19 there's two Mayoral agencies also part of the
20 Cabinet. The work groups meet on a regular basis.
21 They meet mostly monthly and sometimes twice a month
22 depending on the project and the initiative that
23 they're working on. The beauty about the cabinet is
24 that a lot of these projects were projects that we
25 each had in our books.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Affecting
4 older adults, and what we've done is break the silos,
5 join partnerships, and accelerate the progress of
6 those initiatives, and some of them are new and very
7 exciting, but a lot of them have been just breaking
8 down silos between agencies. I can think of one
9 wonderful one with DSS around older adult protective
10 services, like just changing a little bit in the
11 intake process increased the number of clients who
12 can get a particular service, and it was things of
13 that nature that we've looked at the training for
14 young people in high schools on ageism, that has
15 expanded, and it's initiatives that were ready,
16 thought of, that are no cost but added value, and
17 really accelerating that process.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's great. You
19 don't have to list them off now, but maybe you can
20 follow up with the 24 agencies.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I will give
22 you a list of them, and I will give you a list of the
23 subgroups also.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That would be great.
25 Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Senior centers and...

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Also, I want
5 to crow a little bit about the Cabinet.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We're the
8 first in the nation and a model and, as a result of
9 that, we have just assembled, I think it's 30 other
10 cities who we're working with so that they could
11 replicate cabinets...

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's great.

13 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: In their
14 respective cities, and the big challenge for all of
15 us, obviously, is combating ageism...

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And looking
18 at an age-inclusive city.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely. I'm glad
20 to hear that you're expanding your reach nationally.
21 Senior Centers and Meals Programs funding change. NYC
22 Aging's budget is divided into six program areas, one
23 of which is Senior Centers and Meals. This program
24 area's Fiscal 2025 budget, as of the Preliminary
25 Plan, is 26 million less than the Fiscal 2024 adopted

2 budget. What is the reason for this difference and
3 how much, if any, of this relates to the OAC PEG?

4 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: That's
5 the PEG itself.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Just the PEGS?

7 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
8 PEGS.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: So all of it relates
10 to the PEG? Okay, and can you talk about how the
11 programs or services are impacted by it?

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There's no
13 service impact.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: For '24 and '25?

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Correct.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: But '27 and beyond?

17 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Senior Services...

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And that's
20 another one of those things that I want to say. That
21 was really a true partnership with OMB and how we
22 implemented that.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You mean to have the
24 least impact?

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2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: To have no
3 impact on services.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay. Another NYC
5 Aging program area that saw a decrease when comparing
6 the Fiscal '25 budget and the Preliminary Plan to the
7 Fiscal '24 adoption budget is senior services. This
8 program area was 15.1 million less. What's causing
9 this difference?

10 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Part of
11 the discretionary funding.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Discretionary
13 funding? And which programs or services will be
14 impacted by this decrease?

15 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Again,
16 it's what the allocation you guys provide. It's part
17 of the discretionary funding, so whatever happens,
18 then adopt.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right, so...

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Like for
21 right now, part of the discretionary funding, half of
22 it goes to our contracts and the other half goes to
23 stuff that's not contract-related.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right. Can you
25 specify which programs or services?

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2 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: For
3 example, you have...

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: On the noncontract
5 side?

6 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: On the
7 noncontract side?

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Yeah, or I mean...

9 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Right
10 now, for example, on both sides, it can affect
11 additional services provided in the senior centers,
12 right, so the stuff that basically are additive.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Included in
15 that would be the 3.1 million for the vehicles.

16 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: No,
17 that's...

18 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh,
19 separate.

20 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah.

21 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That's last
22 year.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, give me one
24 second, please. All right. Thank you so much. We will

25

2 now move on to public testimony. I really appreciate
3 your time. Yes, please. Sorry. Please.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Just very quickly.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Council Member Brewer
6 has some questions.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Scratch cooking
8 where, maybe you discussed this earlier, but what was
9 the cut, if anything, in case work, and what's the
10 backlog? I guess your Cabinet equals age friendly,
11 but I wanted to know what you're doing on age-
12 friendly, but maybe that's the Cabinet, and then the
13 biggest issue we hear about are no lawyers for those
14 older adults ending up in housing court. Are you
15 monitoring that?

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes. Let me
17 just take them one by one.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's scratch
19 cooking, case work, age-friendly, and lawyers for..

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Case
21 management, we said that there is a 776 waitlist
22 right now, and it's for the full assessment. That
23 doesn't mean that they're not receiving some
24 services, right?

2 The other one was age-friendly. Age-
3 friendly, we've been working very closely with age-
4 friendly and using age-inclusive. As a matter of
5 fact, we were having a meeting of the Commission of
6 age-friendly in March, and the goal is always to take
7 it from age-friendly, which has been phenomenal, and
8 put New York in the lead. In terms of structural
9 differences, age-inclusive goes now to bring it to a
10 policy level so we never abandoned the age-friendly
11 work. All we've done is advanced it and moved it to
12 policy, which is what the role of the Cabinet is.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But the age-
15 friendly Commission is still intact, and we will
16 continue working and getting them to start looking at
17 from an age-inclusive perspective.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I've been to some
19 meetings about it at JCC.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You were in
21 a lot of those meetings in the past.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes. Many of them.
23 Hundreds of them.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Lawyers for older
3 adults.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We have a
5 test program where we work with older individuals
6 that have been identified by the court as having some
7 housing issues, and we have five staff people who
8 work with those individuals to work with them on
9 their housing and needs.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I'm just
11 saying there's a dearth of support, though maybe
12 that's what you're doing, but I can tell you there
13 are just tons of older adults who do not have lawyers
14 going to court, and it's a big problem.

15 Scratch cooking. Only Lenox Hill. Where
16 is everybody else? Lenox Hill has scratch cooking.

17 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I don't know
18 what...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Food is good.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Tell me
21 about Lenox...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Lenox Hill has
23 scratch cooking.

24 CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER MERCADO: Yeah,
25 they have that trainee program.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They have the best
3 scratch cooking program.

4 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Oh, you're
5 talking about their kitchen.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm sorry. I call
9 it scratch cooking. I don't know what the real term
10 is, but...

11 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What I'm saying
13 is, we want other centers to have scratch cooking, so
14 I'm wanting this, whatever you call it, I call it
15 better food..

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But I'm just
18 wondering, and also this, I didn't know if it was
19 something that you're focused on.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes, we do.
21 Our policies right now are, Lennox Hill has a model
22 kitchen program.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They do. It's
24 international model, national model, yes.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: A teaching
3 kitchen and, as a matter of fact, many of our
4 programs are part of that training program and
5 participate in that. What we have done is our
6 nutritional standards now include having plant based...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. Everybody
8 hates it just so you know.

9 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: All right,
10 everybody doesn't hate.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They do hate it.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They don't
13 hate it.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They do hate it.
15 They complain to me all the time.

16 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: There's is
17 different approaches.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They don't like
19 it, Commissioner. I was going to bring that up.

20 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.
21 I'm not going to argue with you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You can like it
23 because you have to, but the rest of the world hates
24 it.

2 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I can tell
3 you that we have seen an uptake and an interest in
4 it.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do not know
6 where.

7 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But it's
8 part of our nutritional approach.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, all right.
10 I'm just letting you know that's not the popular
11 program, but scratch cooking is and maybe you could
12 make something decent with scratch cooking that's
13 plant-based, I don't know, but what I'm saying is..

14 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Scratch
15 cooking..

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That means you
17 just start from, you have a kitchen and you actually
18 cook there as opposed to..

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Right, and
20 many of our programs do that, but scratch kitchen, if
21 I understand it correctly, and you know Lenox Hill
22 much better than I would. I would never presume to
23 argue with you about Lenox Hill, but I understand
24 that they also have a way of reutilizing food over
25 and over again.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

3 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So that they
4 can have maximum use of their food..

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

6 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And have
7 minimum waste which is why they call it scratch
8 kitchen, if I remember correctly, but it is something
9 that we could all learn from and we have many of our
10 programs participating in that training.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Council
14 Member. Thank you again, Commissioner and Jose.

15 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Appreciate your time.
17 I will turn it over to Committee Counsel to start our
18 public testimony.

19 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I just want
20 you to know that we will be leaving, but we have many
21 people watching this so that we too are participating
22 and hear the public testimony.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. We
3 will now move on to public testimony.

4 For those wishing to testify in person,
5 please see the Sergeant-at-Arms in the back of the
6 room and fill out a testimony slip. Even if you have
7 registered online, please still fill out a testimony
8 slip with the Sergeants.

9 All testimony must be on topic. Cursing
10 is considered a violation of decorum. This hearing is
11 being live-streamed and recorded. Witnesses may not
12 use a recording device to film themselves or the
13 proceedings while they are testifying.

14 For those wishing to testify and are on
15 Zoom, after the in-person testimony, we will move on
16 to virtual testimony.

17 Those on Zoom will be called and a prompt
18 to unmute yourself will appear on your computer. All
19 those testifying either in-person or virtually are
20 encouraged to submit testimony at
21 council.nyc.gov/testify or via email at
22 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

23 We will now call our first panel of four
24 witnesses, Tara Klein, M.J. Okma, Xiomara Maldonado,
25 Elizabeth Bird. We will also call Jeanette Estima.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Jeanette, you can
3 come up as well.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Witnesses have two
5 minutes to testify. Tara Klein, you may begin when
6 you hear the cue from the Sergeant.

7 TARA KLEIN: Thank you very much. Good
8 afternoon. My name is Tara Klein. I'm the Deputy
9 Director of Policy and Advocacy for United
10 Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a policy and social
11 change organization that represents neighborhood
12 settlement houses in New York City, and our members
13 run many of the aging programs and services that
14 we've talked about today. Thank you for the
15 opportunity to testify, Chair Hudson.

16 Broadly, we know that these PEG cuts to
17 older adult centers to these programs are
18 irresponsible. We push back on them when there are so
19 many needs in this system, and I'm going to talk
20 about what some of those needs are, and we really
21 need to focus on new needs as our older adult
22 population is growing. What the system needs this
23 year. We need to combat older adult hunger through at
24 least an investment of 65 million in new funds and
25 policy changes. This includes a per meal

2 reimbursement rate for the Home-Delivered Meals
3 program of \$15.31 per meal at least. That would be a
4 12-million-dollar investment this year, and this is
5 to meet the true cost of meals based on a survey
6 we've done of members about true costs along with our
7 advocacy partners. We heard about the MLTC
8 eligibility restriction for Home-Delivered Meals
9 today. Please help us address this at the state
10 level. This is directly hurting older adults and
11 making sure that they cannot access the food that
12 they need. We believe that the State is permitting
13 this, and so we really need help clearing up whatever
14 bureaucratic backlog is happening right now between
15 the State and the City. For older adults and our
16 congregate meals, last year we proposed a lot of new
17 funding to address inflation rates and nothing was
18 added. In fact, a lot of money was cut so we're
19 proposing a 53-million-dollar investment there just
20 to address inflation and, of course, we want to allow
21 grab and go meals at older adult centers who want
22 them. We need a large investment in capital funding.
23 We propose a 50-million-dollar annual fund for the
24 Aging Services Network. Thank you for asking all of
25 the questions about that today. This is urgently

2 needed in our programs. We also support continued
3 growth in the case management program with a 20-
4 million-dollar investment this year. We also call to
5 restore all of the Council aging initiatives,
6 including the NORC initiative. These are really
7 important to the network so thank you for the support
8 to FY23 levels. Finally, just to invest in the human
9 services workforce, we support the Just Pay campaigns
10 call for a 5 percent COLA this year for human
11 services workers, and UNH is also interested in
12 pursuing prevailing wage legislation in New York City
13 to address some of the deeper long-term needs of this
14 sector. It is International Women's Day, and much of
15 the workforce in this sector are women, so let's make
16 a great investment in our workforce. Thank you very
17 much.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
19 Tara.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, we'll hear from
21 M.J. Okma. You may begin when the Sergeant starts the
22 time.

23 M.J. OKMA: Good afternoon, Chair Hudson
24 and Members of the Committee on Aging. My name is
25 M.J. Okma with SAGE. SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+

2 elders and New Yorkers living with HIV for over four
3 decades, providing comprehensive social services and
4 community building programming through our network of
5 LGBTQ+ welcoming older adult centers in New York
6 City, as well as specialized services for homebound
7 elders, LGBTQ+ veterans, transgender elders, and
8 older New Yorkers living with HIV. Services for older
9 New Yorkers are more critical than ever with the
10 population of New Yorkers over the age 60 growing
11 five times faster than those under 18 with LGBTQ+
12 elders making up a significant part of that rapidly
13 growing population. However, LGBTQ+ elders are often
14 invisible, disconnected from services, and severely
15 isolated as they're far likely to live alone and less
16 likely to rely on children or other family members
17 for informal caregiving. In Fiscal Year '25, SAGE is
18 seeking a renewal of our funding at Fiscal Year '24
19 levels, including under the vital LGBTQIA Older Adult
20 Centers in Every Borough initiative that makes our
21 work in Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and in
22 partnership with the Pride Center of Staten Island
23 possible. More information about all the initiatives
24 that we have requested a renewal under are in my
25 written testimony, but I want to use the remainder of

2 my time to really stress that any cuts to aging
3 services will have detrimental impacts on LGBTQ+
4 elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV who
5 already face systematic barriers to services due to
6 ageism, stigma, and discrimination. Beyond that,
7 there's an urgent need for increased investments into
8 New York City Aging, the City's only agency that
9 focuses on older New Yorkers. This Committee has held
10 really important oversight hearings on the needs of
11 LGBTQ+ older New Yorkers, New Yorkers living with
12 HIV, older immigrant New Yorkers, and food insecurity
13 among older New Yorkers, which have all exposed deep
14 gaps in services across the City, and I'd really
15 stress people to listen and read the testimony that
16 was available at all those important oversight
17 hearings. NYC Aging, who's funding has already been
18 cut to the bone, is unable to best meet the needs of
19 these diverse and rapidly growing populations while
20 receiving less than 1 percent of our City's total
21 budget. SAGE deeply values our partnership with the
22 Council, NYC Aging, and looks forward to working with
23 you to fight for more investments in aging services
24 and address the needs of LGBTQ+ elders and older New
25 Yorkers living with HIV in every borough. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thanks, M.J.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
4 Elizabeth Bird. You may begin when the Sergeant
5 starts the clock.

6 ELIZABETH BIRD: Thank you for the
7 opportunity to testify today. My name is Elizabeth
8 Bird. I'm Director of Public Policy at Educational
9 Alliance. We contract with NYC Aging to serve a
10 highly diverse population of about 4,000 older adults
11 annually at our Weinberg Older Adult Center, our Co-
12 op Village NORC, and our Sirovich OAC.

13 Today, I will share testimony on behalf
14 of my colleague, Xiomara Maldonado. She is the Senior
15 Director of Older Adult Programs at EA. Today I'm
16 going to provide six recommendations to make the City
17 budget better reflect its commitment to creating an
18 age-friendly New York.

19 First, maintain Council agency initiative
20 funding at FY23 levels. Council discretionary funding
21 is foundational to our work. The funds you allocated
22 in FY24 helped us cover expenses not funded by our
23 NYC Aging contracts for food program and building
24 supplies, salaries for kitchen, administrative and

2 program personnel, and meaningful trip experiences
3 for our members.

4 Second, baseline capital funds dedicated
5 to repair and maintenance of our older adult centers.
6 Organizations like us simply cannot continue to
7 provide services without resources needed to keep our
8 buildings in good repair.

9 Invest 20 million to expand comprehensive
10 social work for older New Yorkers. Our OACs and NORC
11 have seen an increased need for social services,
12 particularly amongst Chinese-speaking and Spanish-
13 speaking members, as well as increasingly complex
14 cases. With the rapid increase in the number of older
15 adults experiencing homelessness, we need enough
16 staff who can work with members to achieve financial
17 stability, prevent the loss of their homes, apply for
18 benefits like SCRIE and find affordable housing.

19 Next, combat older adult hunger through a
20 53-million-dollar investment in older adult
21 congregate meals to offset recent inflationary costs.
22 Invest in a cost-of-living adjustment for
23 professionals in older adult services and, finally,
24 reverse all cuts to NYC Aging and reinvest in older
25 adults. Planned cuts to OACs at a time when the

2 population of high-need New Yorkers over 60 is
3 growing simply does not reflect a commitment to an
4 age-friendly city. Thank you for the opportunity to
5 testify.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Elizabeth.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
8 Jeanette Estima. You may begin when the sergeant
9 begins the clock.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

11 JEANETTE ESTIMA: Good afternoon. My name
12 is Jeanette Estima, and I'm the Director of Policy
13 and Advocacy at City Meals on Wheels. Thank you,
14 Chair Hudson, for the opportunity to testify today.

15 City Meals was established over 40 years
16 ago to fill a gap in the City's Home-Delivered Meal
17 program, which provides only one meal per day, five
18 days a week, excluding weekends and holidays. We're
19 also a citywide emergency food responder for older
20 New Yorkers who cannot access other emergency food
21 programs in Fiscal '23, we responded to about 63
22 local emergencies with over 34,000 meals, and we pre-
23 supplied Home-Delivered Meals recipients with over
24 160,000 meals in our seasonal emergency food packages
25 to ensure they wouldn't go hungry when extreme

1 weather hits. Like most aging services providers, we
2 continue to see a rapid growth in the need for our
3 services. In FY23, we served about 1,150 more older
4 adults than we did in FY22 and, during the pandemic,
5 our food costs increased by about 33 percent.
6 Therefore, we respectfully request a renewal of the
7 500,000 that we received through the Older Adult
8 Clubs Programs and Enhancements Initiative and an
9 enhancement of 300,000. The entire network of Home-
10 Delivered Meal providers is under extreme pressure
11 caused by increased needs and costs. On average, they
12 saw a 25 percent increase in food cost from a recent
13 survey we did with other HDM providers, but NYC
14 Aging's recent RFP keeps a flat per meal
15 reimbursement rate, making it untenable to maintain
16 that current level of service so we urge the City to
17 increase the reimbursement rate for Home-Delivered
18 Meals contracts to \$15.31 per meal.

19
20 I wanted to answer a question that was
21 raised earlier. During that survey, we also asked
22 folks about their kitchens. Of the 16 providers we
23 spoke with, 6 had non-operational kitchens that were
24 non-operational due to capital needs so we also join
25 our partners in calling for that 50-million-dollar

2 capital fund to repair and upgrade these important
3 community resources. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Jeanette.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this
6 panel of witnesses.

7 We will now call our next panel. Our next
8 panel will be an in-person panel, and we'll call
9 Kevin Kiproviski, Elisa Tustian, Barbara Baer, and
10 Albert Scott. We will also call Kimberly George.

11 My apologies. Kimberly, we'll call you in
12 the next panel. Thank you. I'm sorry. Are you
13 Kimberly? Okay, great. Yes. Please take a seat.

14 Our first witness will be Kevin
15 Kiproviski. You can begin when the Sergeant begins the
16 clock.

17 KEVIN KIPROVSKI: Good afternoon. My name
18 is Kevin Kiproviski, and I'm the Director of Public
19 Policy at LiveOnNY. We represent more than 110
20 community-based non-profits that provide core
21 services that essentially represent most of the New
22 York City Aging portfolio. I want to open by saying
23 Council discretionary funding is foundational to the
24 work of the network, and we are incredibly grateful
25 for the investments that the Council has made over

2 the years. The first thing I want to say is without
3 it, the work would not be possible, and we really do
4 hope that you can maintain the level of support that
5 you've maintained over previous years. Our members
6 and us want to extend a heartfelt thank you for that
7 support.

8 We want to talk about what's keeping
9 people from utilizing the system most effectively,
10 and the number one thing I think we're seeing is that
11 older adult services have huge capital needs based on
12 seeing deteriorating spaces, appliance, and vehicles
13 that have gone without necessary upgrades, sometimes
14 for a decade or longer. Second one is case management
15 organizations are serving individuals with more
16 intensive mental health issues and are seeing less
17 funding from the City. At the same time, I know we've
18 talked about this before, but the City is proposing
19 18-million-dollars cuts to older adult centers with
20 planned cuts of over 50 million dollars in the next
21 five Fiscal Years. When it comes to what
22 organizations capital needs are, we have seen broken
23 refrigerators, floors, bathrooms, kitchens, vans,
24 HVAC systems, roofs, elevators, you name it, and
25 we've seen it broken in an older adult center. The

2 Administration is also then penalizing centers for
3 these issues, but then when requested capital funding
4 to fix them is are being refused. They're being told
5 that they can use accruals, some organizations don't
6 have accruals and, if they do, usually the accruals
7 are tied up in whatever they were assigned for. For
8 example, food accruals were not allowed to be used
9 for anything except food. There was no ability to
10 shift funding even if there was additional funding.
11 Secondly, this is the worst in NYCHA spaces or in
12 RAD-converted spaces where a confusion seems to exist
13 as to who's responsible for which piece, and
14 especially when a RAD conversion occurs, who's
15 responsible there? There definitely needs to be a
16 more functional partnership between NYCHA and NYC
17 Aging to get funding where it needs to go because
18 some of those centers have actually physically
19 collapsed and can no longer be used. Next, case
20 management agencies have seen a reduction of
21 resources. We've heard caseloads have gone up to 65.
22 We've actually heard that in some places they've
23 reached 80 because of the lack of case managers per
24 program, and we've also seen that lots more clients
25 are presenting with undiagnosed mental illness and

2 dementia, which are causing case managers to have to
3 expend more resources per case so not only is their
4 caseload higher, they're seeing more clients, and the
5 contracts did not include funding for intake
6 managers, so they also have a higher administrative
7 burden and this is causing an effect on how cases can
8 be managed and, as we know, there's also a waitlist
9 so the problems are compounding as we speak. The last
10 one is Home-Delivered Meals providers have been
11 operating with a \$2.53 average deficit per meal that
12 will be continued in the new RFP. Our recommendations
13 are, first, maintain the existing Council
14 discretionary funding to keep our system whole. It
15 truly is foundational. Second, to create a baseline
16 capital funding pot, we're saying 50 million now
17 because that's what we're seeing, but to be able to
18 keep centers in a state of good repair. If we're
19 talking about getting more people in, one of our
20 centers got a federal infusion of money that saw,
21 after they did a renovation and built a new center,
22 an influx of over 300 older adults from the community
23 signing up in the first week so, if we're talking
24 about getting more people in, building places people
25 want to be is where that is. Next, identifying reform

2 obstructions for providing capital with NYCHA, 20
3 million to expand social work to give two more case
4 managers and one intake staff, a 12-million-dollar
5 increase to make HDM providers whole at \$15.31 per
6 meal. With all these needs, I think it goes without
7 saying that reversing any planned cuts is necessary
8 when the system has such incredible needs. I want to
9 thank you for the opportunity to testify today and
10 for all the work that you always do to help the Aging
11 Network.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Kevin.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
14 Elisa Tustian.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

16 ELISA TUSTIAN: Good afternoon, Chair
17 Hudson. My name is Elisa Mercedes Tustian, and I am
18 the Supervising Attorney with the Senior Law Project
19 at Volunteers of Legal Service. At VOLS, the Senior
20 Law Project is the largest project we have. We serve
21 low-income New Yorkers 60+ by providing last will and
22 testaments, power of attorney, healthcare proxies,
23 and other essential advance directives. These life
24 planning documents allow our clients to maintain
25 income, avoid homelessness, and ensure that their

2 dying wishes are fulfilled. During the current Fiscal
3 Year, the VOLS Senior Law Project, together with Pro
4 Bono Power, drafted over 700 life planning documents
5 and served over 2,000 older adult New Yorkers. Sadly,
6 too few older adults have poor planning for the
7 future, and we receive many calls from distressed
8 loved ones. Many lower-income adults think that
9 because they do not have great resources or wealth to
10 pass on to the next generation, they do not need to
11 have advanced directives in place or they incorrectly
12 believe that their children will be able to
13 automatically access their finances when the time of
14 need comes. Meanwhile, an older adult who has
15 executed a power-of-attorney authorizes their agent
16 to seek government benefits on their behalf to pay
17 for housing costs, to sign leases, to do annual
18 recertifications for NYCHA, to apply for and
19 recertify for SCRIE benefits, and to deal with any
20 issues that may arise in their apartment.
21 Unfortunately, a caregiver without a power-of-
22 attorney may find themselves powerless and forced to
23 go through guardianship through the courts, and it
24 can be expensive and a lengthy process. Most low-
25 income families cannot afford to retain counsel for

2 the guardianship filing, and it is an administrative
3 burden on already tax-timed families to represent
4 themselves in these matters. Even if a caregiver
5 petitions successfully for guardianship at that
6 point, an older adult may have already lost their
7 home and much needed public benefits, whereas
8 documents like a power-of-attorney can mitigate risks
9 of losing their benefits, housing, and help them
10 maintain the ability to age in place. We're on the
11 ground, Chair Hudson. We walked up the steps at the
12 109th Street location when the elevator was down
13 recently and visited the Fort Washington Avenue
14 location after the flooding because of the recent
15 rains. We love working with you, and we ask that you
16 continue to support our work so we can continue to be
17 with the seniors of New York.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely. Thank
19 you, Elisa. Appreciate it.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
21 Barbara Baer. You may begin when the Sergeant begins
22 the clock.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

24 BARBARA BAER: This is the most daunting
25 task I've ever had.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You'll be great.

3 Don't worry.

4 BARBARA BAER: Speaking for two minutes is
5 not my thing. Good afternoon. I'm Barbara Baer from
6 the New York Foundation for Seniors. I'm the Director
7 of the Home Sharing and Respite Program and,
8 Chairperson Hudson, God bless you and thank you. Last
9 year, we stood on your shoulders and you allocated
10 with the Council 200,000, which was about half of our
11 budget and allowed us to continue home sharing and
12 respite care and, as you see from the prepared
13 remarks, we're asking for 250, but we'd be thrilled
14 with 200, and we thank you for your generosity. I
15 don't have to tell you about the program, except it's
16 a matching program where we match one person 60 and
17 one person over 18, and we work really hard to have
18 them safe and companionable. This year, Chairperson
19 Hudson, we're actually doing better. We believe that
20 we'll have 30 matches, which is more than we've had.
21 It seems like a de minimis amount of matches but, in
22 each case, my view is that we've saved two lives. One
23 person can pay their rent or their mortgage, and the
24 other person has a safe place to live and so we hope
25 that you will fund that. Additionally, in that

2 200,000, we have respite care, and my colleague is
3 here, Victoria, so what we do is offer respite care
4 to seniors and, basically, the senior has the
5 opportunity to pay a little bit more than half of
6 what they would pay for homecare at a for-profit
7 agency. That's \$18.55 an hour. We've helped hundreds
8 and hundreds of seniors and employed loads of
9 homecare workers. I'm going to stop, but to say that
10 over the past 43 years, we've helped more than 12,000
11 people in respite care and we've matched about 1,250
12 matches, and I consider each match building an
13 affordable housing unit, and it's cheaper than
14 anything, so I consider it a really humanitarian and
15 inexpensive way to help seniors. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.
17 Just so you know, your written testimony is on the
18 record, and we do review the full thing so even if we
19 didn't get to read everything, we've still got it.

20 BARBARA BAER: Okay, great. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Barbara.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
23 Albert Scott. You may begin when the Sergeant starts
24 the clock.

2 ALBERT SCOTT: All right. Thank you. Good
3 afternoon, Chair Hudson. My name is Albert Scott. I'm
4 with the East New York Economic Society. Real
5 quickly, it's more or less to see if you can increase
6 a, whether it's a budget line item that will
7 encourage the New York City Department of Aging and
8 this dynamic Committee to start researching the
9 retirement crisis, in particular for Generation X and
10 Millennials. Recent reports have been released that
11 majority, not the average, but the median of folks
12 that has money in there for retirement savings or
13 401k is 10,000 or less, and I'm not going to even
14 break down the demographics as it pertains to Blacks,
15 Hispanics, and things of that nature because that
16 becomes even more daunting. After hearing what the
17 Commissioner stated, Commissioner is stating today
18 about, don't know how monies are going to look in the
19 future, it's very important that we definitely take a
20 proactive approach so we're just simply asking if you
21 could, A, increase the budget line item for that,
22 that will help incentivize because I heard them
23 mention something about a Cabinet, and then also
24 bring in the Committee Members because this is very
25 concerning, especially for East New York and

2 Brownsville residents and also increase the budget
3 item for intergenerational services. As we move
4 forward into the AI technology, this would be a great
5 opportunity for either Generation Alpha or Z to
6 initiate because I heard it from someone from the
7 Divine Nine, I believe Sigma Gamma Rho, where they
8 actually mentioned, know your cell phone because,
9 believe it or not, some folks don't even know how to
10 do FaceTime in this day and age and interact with it
11 accordingly so thank you for your time and patience,
12 and hopefully we can definitely move forward. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this
16 panel of witnesses. We will now call our next in
17 person panel.

18 This panel will consist of Kimberly
19 George and (INAUDIBLE).

20 As a reminder, if you wish to testify and
21 you're in-person but you have not filled out a
22 registration slip, please find a Sergeant.

23 Kimberly George, you may begin your
24 testimony when the Sergeant begins the clock.

2 KIMBERLY GEORGE: Thank you, Chair Hudson,
3 for the opportunity to present today. My name is
4 Kimberly George, and I'm the President of Project
5 Guardianship. As you know, we are a New York City-
6 based non-profit that provides legal guardianship
7 services to New Yorkers in need of surrogate
8 decision-making. We also provide a range of
9 preventative services to help New Yorkers access
10 critical health and social services prior to
11 guardianship. Doing so helps to ensure that
12 guardianship remains the tool of last resort as it is
13 intended to be. Because of our varied boots on the
14 ground expertise, we inform guardianship reform
15 policies and practices. The people for whom we
16 provide guardianship services have a few things in
17 common. First, they have experienced an event in
18 their lives that caused them to lose decision-making
19 capacity. That event could be the onset of a
20 disability, dementia, serious mental illness,
21 substance misuse, traumatic brain injury, or other
22 conditions that impact their ability to manage their
23 daily activities and potentially put them in harm's
24 way. The second thing our clients have in common is
25 an absence of family member or friends willing or

2 able to serve as their guardian. The majority of our
3 clients are older adults who are aging alone. This
4 reflects a national trend that one third of older
5 adults are living alone. Finally, our clients have no
6 funds to pay for a private guardian with 96 percent
7 of them living under 80 percent of the area median
8 income. These three factors, loss of capacity, social
9 isolation, and lack of financial resources make our
10 clients among the most vulnerable residents of our
11 city. As such, it is essential that they have
12 advocates looking out for their health, safety, and
13 dignity. These are our priorities at Project
14 Guardianship, and we achieve them by deploying
15 multiple-disciplinary teams of social workers,
16 lawyers, finance associates, and housing and benefits
17 specialists. We keep our client-to-staff ratio low
18 because the work that we do on behalf of our clients
19 is intense and time consuming. We make every effort
20 to keep our clients aging in their homes and
21 communities and out of institutions. What I'm
22 describing is not only challenging work for our
23 staff, it is also expensive. On average, our per-
24 client cost is 10,000 and that's for good reason.
25 When we become somebody's guardian, we manage all

2 aspects of their lives, usually for the remainder of
3 their life. When our docket is full, as it is today,
4 we have to tell appointing judges in guardianship
5 parts that we cannot take their appointments because
6 we are at capacity. We recently heard that in New
7 York City, judges cannot find guardians for half
8 their cases when a guardian is needed on any given
9 day. This crisis and the lack of funding that has led
10 to a shortage of guardians is partly responsible for
11 the case of Judith Zbiegniewicz, which ProPublica did
12 an article that was published yesterday. If you
13 haven't read the story, it's an account of what can
14 happen when we don't invest in good guardianship,
15 mainly the erosion of human rights, dignity, health,
16 and safety at the hands of unscrupulous guardians. In
17 this case, a guardian posing as a non-profit. To be
18 clear, non-profits are exceptionally fit to do this
19 work. They have deep ties to their communities and
20 diverse skills and knowledge to navigate complex
21 situations. They often surpass the court's minimum
22 care requirements for guardians and, critically,
23 their success is measured not by their ability to
24 turn a profit but rather by their ability to improve
25 outcomes for the people in their care. New York

2 City's, as you know, population is booming, and we
3 cannot look away from this crisis any longer. Good
4 guardianship must be prioritized and funded
5 adequately. Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
7 Kimberly.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: This concludes our in-
9 person witnesses. We will now turn to our witnesses
10 participating virtually.

11 We will call you one by one. Please be
12 alert for the prompt to unmute yourself.

13 Our first virtual witness is Jolene
14 Boden. You may begin when the Sergeant starts the
15 clock.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

17 JOLENE BODEN: I am Jolene Bowden, the
18 Director of Case Management at Sunnyside Community
19 Services. I thank you for the opportunity to testify
20 today and for supporting older adults in New York. We
21 are proud to serve 16,000 New Yorkers of all ages,
22 mainly in Western Queens, but you will find our
23 participants throughout the borough and beyond, and
24 we're delighted to share that we are celebrating our
25 50th anniversary this year. For those unfamiliar with

2 Sunnyside Community Services, we're a community-based
3 not-for-profit centered on the belief that every
4 person deserves meaningful support to achieve their
5 aspirations, especially struggling families and
6 individuals. Older Adult Services at Sunnyside
7 promote healthy aging and enable the older members of
8 our community to age comfortably in place for as long
9 as possible. Our continuum of services to support
10 people as they age includes caregiving, geriatric
11 mental health, case management, a vibrant older adult
12 center, and elder justice. Homecare provides
13 essential care for homebound older adults and people
14 with disabilities, and we have a social adult day
15 program for people with Alzheimer's. For immigrants,
16 we offer English classes, legal support assistance,
17 and access to benefits. Additionally, as part of our
18 non-profit force, my organization plays a role in the
19 City's recovery. As a member of the Human Service
20 Council, we're calling on the City to provide 3.2
21 percent COLA and a commitment for COLAs in future
22 years. Our city has been continuously seeing an
23 increase in the older adult population. Every year we
24 hear predictions that the silver tsunami, when the
25 baby boomers turned 65, continues to be growing at a

2 faster level than expected. This translates to older
3 adults needing more services and access to more
4 benefits and entitlements. These needs were supposed
5 to be addressed by services under the auspices of
6 government area agencies on aging, but what do we see
7 in New York City? We see needs increasing and funding
8 decreasing. In the most recent contract award for
9 case management services, my agency saw our funding
10 go down...

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

12 JOLENE BODEN: And, stop you said?

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You can continue.

14 JOLENE BODEN: Okay. Saw our funding go
15 down and the asks on our staff to go up. We were
16 forced to juggle the roles of competent, trained,
17 underpaid professionals to fit the decreased funding
18 burden. We need to choose between increased caseloads
19 or eliminating an intake person. We need to choose
20 between maintaining the status quo or administrative
21 staff or cutting one person to fit into the funding
22 provided. The agency needs to figure out where we can
23 absorb our rent, electric, and maintenance because it
24 simply would not fit into the funds provided. All of
25 the increasing needs being presented by our clients

2 require case managers to spend more time on each
3 case. As was said before, how do you do that when you
4 have an excess of 65 cases? Our program is
5 continually recruiting staff, but it's a revolving
6 door because case managers are dedicated and
7 committed, but there's just so much they can do and
8 be undervalued and underpaid. Our staff also has to
9 live in this city where costs and expenses continue
10 to rise. Every year, we rally and advocate for
11 increases in salaries, and every year we get nominal
12 crumbs of increases while others around us that are
13 professionals get significant raises in recognition.
14 It's time to value the work that's done by our
15 community-based organizations, to acknowledge the
16 money we save by keeping people safely in the
17 community and not in residential facilities. It's
18 time to show the older adults who built our city that
19 they matter enough to have the staff and the
20 resources that they deserve. I stand here before you
21 once again saying do not cut funding to older adult
22 services, do not make our dedicated staff work even
23 harder to keep people safe, do not ask agencies to
24 choose between serving clients and paying rent. I ask
25 you to give us the funding that ensures we have the

2 resources to keep our older adults safely in the
3 communities we serve. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Jolene.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness will
6 be Dr. Cynthia Maurer.

7 After Dr. Maurer, we will call Sofiya
8 Pidzyraylo.

9 Dr. Maurer, you may begin when the
10 Sergeant begins the clock.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

12 DR. CYNTHIA MAURER: My name is Dr.
13 Cynthia Maurer and I'm representing Visiting
14 Neighbors. We're an organization that has been
15 determined to keep people independent, active, as
16 safe and healthy as possible, and in their own homes.
17 We work with the seniors who are 60 and over, but
18 majority of our people are over the age of 85. We
19 really do work with the oldest old. We have right now
20 25 seniors who turned 100, and they're going strong.
21 We're seeing a trend not only in aging but in
22 resiliency. Even five years ago, when seniors would
23 go into a hospital, there was a 50/50 chance of them
24 not ever coming home. Now, even just last week, we
25 had a 100-year-old who fell and injured her arm and

2 our 102-year-old who had some respiratory issues go
3 in the hospital and they're back so they're home and
4 they are determined to stay in their home and keep
5 active, and our volunteers connect them with the
6 community and keep them engaged. The services we
7 provide are health management, health advocacy,
8 student health where the students nursing program
9 that we have, we have young people who are monitored
10 by their professors who go in and do blood pressure
11 checks. We're on the front lines. We're seeing what
12 goes on directly in the home so that there isn't this
13 revolving door every time they go into a hospital and
14 only wind up all alone and then wind up going back
15 there and often for minor incidences. We provide
16 health and wellness information, physical, mental,
17 emotional, and friendly visiting. It is not just a
18 nicety, friendly visiting. It is volunteers having
19 eyes and ears on our seniors, being able to report
20 back to see how a senior is doing. We have our shop
21 and escort program where we enable seniors to get to
22 and from all kinds of appointments, all kinds of
23 errands, everything from going to the bank to go to
24 shop for clothes to get their hair done because a
25 100-year-old who has beautiful...

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

3 DR. CYNTHIA MAURER: White flowing hair
4 may still want to go get their hair done. We are so
5 grateful to the New York City Council for being our
6 heroes. You've got to continue this trend of being
7 champions for our older adults because we are living
8 longer, we are aging and, if we're lucky, we'll all
9 become one with a support system in place and, if we
10 don't have family or friends that are able to help
11 us, we better hope that there's a non-profit like
12 Visiting Neighbors or some of these other wonderful
13 programs that are here doing the services in the
14 community and our seniors, majority of them do not
15 get to senior centers, and when they do, we take them
16 there. Our programs are here to keep people active
17 mind-wise and also spirit and emotionally. We do
18 everything from serious stuff to getting seniors to
19 and from their important doctor's appointments,
20 including if they have to go to physical therapy or
21 chemo appointments to the little niceties.

22 I'll end on this note. I know that I've
23 sent the Council and some of the Members some of the
24 Valentine's cards that are local school children do,
25 something like this where, I don't know if you can

2 see it, but basically we get back responses like
3 this. Dear boys and girls, thank you for the
4 beautiful Valentine's card. It's the only one I got.
5 This made me smile. Jenny, 88; and then dear
6 students, thank you so much for the beautiful
7 Valentine card. It's the only card I received, and it
8 makes my day a very happy one. My love to all of you
9 from this 95-year-old, Lydia. The reality is that we
10 all need some love and compassion and programs like
11 Visiting Neighbors provides a multitude of services.
12 We become the best friend and the companion and the
13 family to many seniors who don't have access to that,
14 and when we're there, we're there to also monitor all
15 of their emotional supports and also make connections
16 to other services like VOLS and other programs like
17 SCRIE to make sure that they get access to everything
18 they possibly could use. Thank you for being there
19 for us, and we need you to continue to fight for us,
20 and we also ask that you remember us with all of the
21 funding because we are as cost-effective as you're
22 going to find and, yes, we definitely keep people
23 home and still part of our community. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Cynthia.

25 Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness will
3 be Sofiya Pidzyraylo and, after Sofiya, we will call
4 Elijah Rameker.

5 Sofiya, you may begin when the Sergeant
6 starts the clock.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

8 SOFIYA PIDZYRAYLO: Chair Hudson, thank
9 you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sofiya
10 Pidzyraylo. I'm the Director at Village View NORC at
11 University Settlement. Every year, University
12 Settlement partners with 40,000 New Yorkers in Lower
13 Manhattan and Brooklyn through programming for all
14 ages. Overall, we call for more funding for older
15 adults. New York City Aging's budget is the smallest,
16 even while the older adults is growing rapidly. We
17 need to invest further in older adults programming
18 and services. As we know, COVID has changed many of
19 our expectations and preferences. Our older adult
20 center and programs have needed to continue online or
21 hybrid offerings in addition to in-person services.
22 We may need different metrics to assess the success
23 of older adult centers. For Home-Delivered Meals, the
24 reimbursement rate for home-based meals needs to be
25 increased to at least \$15.31 per meal in the FY25

2 budget. This would better reflect the average true
3 cost of providing services, including the impact of
4 inflation. Additionally, we urge New York City Aging
5 to reverse the Home-Delivered Meals restriction on
6 MLTC clients. Not everyone on Medicaid has a home
7 health aide, and those who want a home health aide
8 face difficulty applying for help and retaining
9 aides. We need to make sure there are enough hours
10 available to meet the need. For those participants
11 with home healthcare, they reported hours reduced
12 this year. Additionally, our older adults need free,
13 affordable access to the internet. Almost all of our
14 low-income older adults depend on the ACP program,
15 which is ending in April 2024. The loss of free
16 internet means they will no longer be able to connect
17 with friends, family, and support online. We would
18 also like to see older adult centers offer the same
19 nursing services as the services provided at NORCs.
20 Finally, we need to support the staff working with
21 older adults. We must include a multi-year cost-of-
22 living adjustment, or COLOA for human service
23 workers...

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

2 SOFIYA PIDZYRAYLO: With 5 percent in FY25
3 and 3 percent for the following Fiscal Years. Pass
4 and fully fund legislation to create a prevailing
5 wage schedule for human service workers. Thank you
6 for your time. If you have any questions, you can
7 reach me at 212-475-0150 or email
8 vvnorc@universitysettlement.org. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Sofiya.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness will
11 be Elijah Rameker and, after Elijah, we will call
12 Kevin Jones.

13 Elijah, you can begin when the Sergeant
14 starts the clock.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

16 ELIJAH RAMEKER: I want to thank Chair
17 Hudson and Members of the Aging Committee for holding
18 this hearing and giving the Asian American
19 Federation, AAF, the opportunity to testify. I'm
20 Elijah Rameker, Policy Intern at AAF, where we
21 proudly represent more than 70 member non-profits
22 serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers. Going into
23 FY25, Asian older adults continue to endure the
24 impacts of teetering economic conditions and
25 continued anti-Asian hate. Our Seniors Working Group,

2 the first and only Asian older adult focused advocacy
3 coalition in the City, is composed of 12 Asian-led,
4 Asian older adult serving member organizations. Since
5 its inception, the SWG, under the guidance of the
6 AAF, has become an authoritative voice for
7 policymakers to reference and consult with about
8 addressing the concerns of Asian older adults. Food
9 insecurity is among the top concerns of Asian older
10 adults within our Seniors Working Group, in addition
11 to anti-Asian violence, functioning older adult
12 centers, and mental health, all of which are
13 interconnected. A lack of cultural sensitivity in
14 meal programs, however, has become an issue for many
15 older adult service providers recently, according to
16 members of our SWG. The arbitrary and inaccurate
17 standards for culturally sensitive meals set by DFTA
18 have left many providers restricted with the meal
19 options they can offer Asian older adult clients. CBO
20 staff members say meeting our most vulnerable where
21 they are with culturally competent, effective older
22 adult services requires systemic change. They said
23 that DFTA's one-size-fits-all model creates
24 additional challenges and barriers for Asian and
25 immigrant communities. This necessitates further

2 understanding of our diverse community's needs as
3 such change is dependent on the City and its work in
4 supporting it, reinforcing, and building capacity for
5 programming by our communities. Our recommendations
6 for further action are as follows. One, increase
7 funding to Asian-led Asian-serving older adult
8 service providers. Two, prioritize funding both
9 congregate and remote services and programming.
10 Three, continue funding a network of linguistically
11 and culturally competent food service programs that
12 provide alternative food benefits to older adults.
13 Four, expand funding to include culturally competent
14 in-language and older adult focused non-traditional
15 mental health service models. On behalf of the Asian
16 American Federation, thank you for raising up the
17 work that needs to be done and prioritizing the
18 voices and needs of our older adults and our older
19 adult service providers, the true experts in this
20 work. We look forward to working with all of you in
21 the near future and want to emphasize...

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

23 ELIJAH RAMEKER: That policymakers always
24 have a standing invitation to our Senior Working
25 Group meetings. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Elijah.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
4 Kevin Jones and, after Kevin, we will call Wendell
5 Walters.

6 Kevin, you may begin when the Sergeant
7 starts the clock.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

9 KEVIN JONES: Good afternoon, Chair Hudson
10 and Members of the City Council. My name is Kevin
11 Jones. I'm the Associate State Director for Advocacy
12 at AARP New York, which represents 750,000 members in
13 New York City. We appreciate the opportunity to
14 testify today.

15 Older adults represent New York's fastest
16 growing demographic. According to a report from
17 Center for Urban Future, New York City's 65 and over
18 population grew by 36 percent, or about 363,000
19 people, between 2011 and 2021. Today, our city is
20 home to 1.3 million older adults, which is nearly the
21 entire population of the Bronx. Older adults are a
22 tremendous asset to our city. They're a vital driving
23 force in our economy, cultural life and volunteer
24 base, but they face unique challenges as well. While
25 the older adult population has increased, the number

2 of older New Yorkers living below the poverty line
3 grew by over 37 percent while the number of living in
4 the shelter system tripled. This new demographic
5 reality really illustrates how the City needs to
6 prioritize the basic needs of our older adults. New
7 York City Aging receives less than 1 percent of the
8 City's budget and now the Mayor is proposing even
9 more cuts in the upcoming Fiscal Year. Our main
10 priorities for the budget, I'm going to submit a
11 longer list in writing, but our main three priorities
12 for the budget include food security because older
13 adults living in poverty have to make tough choices
14 between things like rent and food, and these same
15 older adults are now dealing with the impacts of
16 inflation, which has rapidly increased food prices,
17 making it even harder for them to put food on their
18 table. Another top priority of ours is ensuring
19 adequate capital funding to meet the infrastructure
20 needs of older adult centers. While many of these
21 centers are beautiful, vibrant spaces, there are
22 centers all across the five boroughs that desperately
23 need investments to address issues like mold, broken
24 heating and cooling systems, and other things like
25 that some of my colleagues have already mentioned

2 today. Last, we'd like to mention that we support an
3 increase in the investment of community-based care
4 for non-profits that provides essential services for
5 older adults...

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

7 KEVIN JONES: Including human service
8 providers. I will, like I said, submit more details
9 in writing, but I want to thank you all for giving us
10 the opportunity today, and I will give back the rest
11 of my time. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thanks, Kevin.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness is
14 Wendell Walters. Wendell, you may begin when the
15 Sergeant starts the clock.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

17 WENDELL WALTERS: Thank you, Chair Hudson
18 and the Members of the Aging Committee, for the
19 opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is
20 Wendell Walters, and I am the Manager of Policy and
21 Advocacy at the Osborne Association. Osborne is one
22 of the largest and oldest criminal justice service
23 organizations in the state. Each year, we serve
24 10,000 participants from arrest to re-entry and,
25 since 2014, have been focusing on the needs of older

2 adults in prison and jail and their re-entry.
3 Attention to the needs of older people in New York
4 City is critical, and that includes caring about
5 older people who are incarcerated and returning home
6 to New York City. As a city and a society, we are
7 ignoring the needs of older people in jails and
8 prisons and those returning to our communities at an
9 enormous cost in dollars, lives, well-being, lost
10 wisdom, and contributions to society. The resources
11 we are "investing" in keeping older people locked up
12 are hurting them and us. Based on the annual cost of
13 incarceration of about 560,000 dollars per person per
14 year on Rikers, simply bringing two people off Rikers
15 who were there for one year would fund an entire
16 specialized unit in New York City Aging to focus on
17 justice-impacted older adults. We recommend creating
18 such a unit. Finding a place to reside is the biggest
19 obstacle for these individuals when they return home.
20 Osborne is poised to soon open the Fulton Community
21 Re-entry Center that will provide 140 transitional
22 housing beds for older men returning from prison with
23 an array of re-entry services in the former State-
24 owned Fulton Correctional Facility in the Bronx. We
25 are grateful for the past Council funding for Fulton,

2 and we are again requesting Council support in the
3 amount of 250,000 dollars. Osborne for many years now
4 has been educating the public about the incarcerated
5 older adult and advocating for support on their
6 behalf through our elder re-entry initiative
7 previously funded by the Council. We ask for
8 continued support for the program in the amount of
9 100,000 dollars for program services and public
10 education on behalf of those older adults. Please let
11 us as a city not forget these individuals as society
12 often does. Osborne is committed to doing the work
13 and, with the help and support from the Council, we
14 will continue to do so. Thank you very much. We will
15 submit our full written testimony for your review.

16 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you, Wendell.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our next witness will
18 be an in-person witness, Po-Ling Ng.

19 Po-Ling, you may begin when the Sergeant
20 begins the clock.

21 PO-LING NG: Good evening, our honorable
22 and Chair Hudson and all the City Members. First of
23 all, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to say
24 a few words. I am the last one, but I'm thinking
25 about I'm going to share with you very, very

2 important information, and I, on behalf of the
3 Chinese-American Planning Council, is the huge non-
4 private social service organization citywide. We
5 provide a different kind of services, but the one
6 thing I invite our lovely Hudson to visit our center,
7 but I know you are very busy. I was sending
8 everything (INAUDIBLE) for you, but you're not
9 showing up, and so that's why we are a little
10 disappointed so today I really want to sharing with
11 you, I really want you to pay special attention for
12 us. Especially during the COVID-19, our seniors feel
13 very suffering, not only the COVID-19 really make our
14 difficulty to survive, and also anti-Asian elderly.
15 Our seniors are very afraid to take the subway and
16 bus, even walk on the street because their children
17 always give them the warning, don't go out, and I
18 think if you go out, you will facing a lot of safety
19 problem so that's why they, if keep them at home,
20 they will feel very lonely. You know that the lonely
21 is very serious problem for the senior. I'm sorry, so
22 that's why I don't want to testify.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's okay. You can
24 continue.

25 PO-LING NG: Only two minutes.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: You can continue.

3 That's okay. Take your time.

4 PO-LING NG: Okay. Let me talk. I think
5 you give me two hours, I will talk better than two
6 minutes. The one thing, so that's why, that's not
7 mean, and we isolate our senior because this is a
8 very difficult time, we should pay more special
9 attention for our senior but, right now, I don't want
10 to talk so many, because Open Door, I am only one
11 Director over there is 52 years, only one Director,
12 so that's why I really know what is the problem,
13 what's the need for the senior. Right now, I have two
14 or three major questions. I really want you to help
15 me to resolve the problem right now. Cannot wait. The
16 one thing is, while we provide the Meals On Wheels,
17 get and go, congregate meals, emergency meal,
18 everything but, right now, before we had three
19 drivers, but right now we drop down to one so how
20 could we run so many different nutrition program,
21 only one driver, but this driver not only for the
22 Meals on Wheels and also for the congregate meal, for
23 the emergency meal, and you understand that special
24 Meals on Wheels, we should deliver meals to our
25 clients, hot food kit, hot, cold food kit, cold. That

2 means we should deliver the meal in two hours, but we
3 deliver very poor area. The (INAUDIBLE). The little
4 Italy, Chinatown, very poor area, only one driver so
5 that's why I give our very good name, not only Meals
6 on Wheels, really Meals on Heels because we don't
7 have money for the vehicle, for the insurance, for
8 the driver, yeah, but we had a very good heart. We
9 want to deliver more meals to our needy person so
10 that's why this one question. I really want you give
11 me more money to hire the more driver and more
12 insurance, every expensive thing.

13 The second, I facing the very suffering
14 thing. Before I know, Hudson, you really know our
15 former Chair of the City Council on Aging is Margaret
16 Chen. Every year, she give us more than 80,000 to
17 100,000 a year for Open Door, for facility repair,
18 replace and fix but, right now, our lovely new
19 Council, Marte, after he be the City Council, give us
20 none, zero, so you know that right now the food cost
21 is very high, and maintenance fee is very high, but
22 we never get the additional money from the City
23 Council. From big number to the zero. You think
24 that's fair for us? Asian American population is
25 increasing very high (INAUDIBLE) increasing very

2 high. Why damage our senior? No money to fix for the
3 facility. The driver from three to one. How could we
4 deliver meals? Because I have so many questions I
5 want to ask you but, right now, and I remember that
6 last week, I was seeing you very exciting for the
7 (INAUDIBLE) to the New York State, we want to bring
8 our assembly, our senator, our congress, whatever,
9 but we don't have chance to open our mouth to sharing
10 the information so we just, the one thing, I'm sorry,
11 I'm not complain, because Department for the Aging is
12 very well, and I think, who played a very important
13 role to resolve the problem, including our funding
14 agents. Our sponsor agents really depend on our
15 lovely Chair Hudson and all the Members of City
16 Council. Please, come to visit our center then you
17 know how great our job to complete but, without
18 money, we cannot do anything. I know you have a good
19 heart. You care of the little person, especially the
20 senior. I care of that too so that's why please, come
21 to visit us then later on, today I open my mouth,
22 next time you should open your pocket. Give us money,
23 then we will do the thing is good, okay? I'm sorry if
24 you want me talk, I'll talk. I have nothing to talk.
25 The one thing, money.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

3 PO-LING NG: Okay.

4 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I appreciate. I have
5 a couple of questions for you.

6 PO-LING NG: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: May I? Okay, so one,
8 did you say you invited me to come?

9 PO-LING NG: I've invited you so many
10 times. I'm waiting for you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, I'm going to...

12 PO-LING NG: But you never show up.

13 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, where's your
14 older adult club or senior center?

15 PO-LING NG: CPC had four senior adult
16 daycare. One in Queens, one in Brooklyn, two in
17 Chinatown. I think last time you visit the Chinatown
18 Senior Center, you did not visit Open Door Senior
19 Center.

20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

21 PO-LING NG: We open the door, welcome
22 you, but you will never come. We don't want to close
23 the door.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Please don't close
25 the door. I wasn't aware of the invitation.

2 PO-LING NG: 168 Grant Street.

3 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, I'll follow up
4 with CAPC and make sure I get to one of your centers
5 soon.

6 PO-LING NG: Please, we need you. We need
7 all our City Council Members...

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Absolutely.

9 PO-LING NG: Come to visit us, then you
10 could see how wonderful we are. Okay?

11 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I just want to
12 confirm, the reason that you've gone from three
13 drivers to one is solely due to funding?

14 PO-LING NG: Not only funding.

15 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

16 PO-LING NG: (INAUDIBLE) of the funding
17 Also, you know that the Chinatown is not easy to
18 looking for the parking.

19 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

20 PO-LING NG: Yeah, so that's why my driver
21 had attack because when he deliver meal he just park
22 the vehicle downstairs and jump up. You understand our
23 area most of the old building. No elevator.

24 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Right.

2 PO-LING NG: They jump up, jump down, and
3 then get the ticket but, when he get the ticket, I
4 went to the DOT, they said that, no excuse, you
5 should pay your penalty, but we don't have money to
6 pay the penalty so couldn't pay for it. The staff pay
7 for it. That's unfair.

8 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: That's not fair,
9 okay.

10 PO-LING NG: I tell you, please come to
11 visit me. I will share with you more detailed
12 information because two minutes is over a long time
13 already. I'm sorry.

14 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much,
15 Po-Ling. I appreciate your testimony, and I'll see
16 you soon.

17 PO-LING NG: Okay.

18 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay.

19 PO-LING NG: Thank you, thank you, you so
20 lovely.

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you.

22 PO-LING NG: You have a good day.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you. You too.

24 PO-LING NG: Happy New Year.

2 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Happy New Year to
3 you. Take care.

4 PO-LING NG: Sorry.

5 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Okay, I don't think
6 we have any more witnesses who would wish to testify.

7 I just want to thank everybody who has
8 testified, thank you all for your patience, and thank
9 you for being here to listen to the Administration's
10 testimony.

11 I think it is clear that we need to
12 restore the cuts to the Department for the Aging or
13 NYC Aging, we need to expand their budget to support
14 the growing older adult population.

15 With that, I want to thank everyone again
16 and conclude today's hearing. It's adjourned.

17 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 20, 2024