



**TESTIMONY**

Presented by

**Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez  
Commissioner**

on

**Oversight: Interagency Coordination on Older Adult Issues**

before the

**New York City Council  
Committee on Aging**

on

**Thursday, April 4, 2024  
At 1:00 p.m.**

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson, and members of the New York City Council Committee on Aging. I am Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, Commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging (NYC Aging). It is a great pleasure to join you today to discuss NYC Aging's Interagency Coordination on Older Adult Issues and how we are utilizing the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers to ensure that New York City's fastest growing demographic—adults over the age of 60—is served through budget neutral initiatives across agencies. The NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers is a unique model that New York City, and this Administration, is using to build an age-inclusive city by bringing together city agencies to harness the voices of older adults to inform policy, systems and operation, combat discrimination, and cultivate lasting change. Additionally, NYC Aging does collaborative work with our partner agencies both within and outside of the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers.

As you know, NYC Aging administers a wide range of programs that enhance the independence and quality of life for the City's older adult population. A key component to NYC Aging's mission is to ensure that all older New Yorkers both have access to city services and programs at our agency and with our partners in city government, and to work toward reducing barriers that hinder an older adult's ability to age in place with dignity while improving their quality of life. I am excited to discuss with you the origin for the Cabinet, how it functions, and the recent impacts we have seen through Cabinet initiatives.

The Cabinet for Older New Yorkers ensures collaboration between member agencies by identifying gaps or barriers in existing services while combatting ageism through the work done in Cabinet working groups. We work to ensure there are no insidious ageist practices, protocols or messages in the operations or outreach and education messages. To date, we have seen impressive progress in several of the initiatives and projects. You may wonder why or how does ageism impact service delivery. Due to the work of the Cabinet, 972 frontline healthcare workers, including about 16% of the total H+H frontline force, has been trained to become experts in aging services and can better address the needs of older adults they come in contact with beyond simply their health. Similarly, SCRIE applications are now being processed as a result of a partnership with PEU where older adults evaluated by Adult Protective Services (APS) are now being screened for the rental assistance program.

Ageism is still the last critically pervasive social injustice with a level of acceptability for discrimination, we must marshal all forms of government, every agency, every member of the Council, to stand up against ageism. That is why I was pleased to see Council's interest and partnership in promoting the work of the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers and may making the Cabinet permanent with the Introduction 0689-2024. We support the Council's intent to ensure that future Mayors, Councils, or Commissioners of NYC Aging will continue to facilitate the success for older adult of today and tomorrow. We look forward to discussing the bill further to ensure full alignment.

### **Origin, Functions, & Impacts**

When the concept of Age-Friendly Environments was first developed more than 10 years ago, differing levels of government and community organizations first explored the issue that aging should not be siloed into disparate organizations or structures. Because we saw the need for component parts of government to collaborate and innovate to address issues affecting older adults, we tried to address problems individually between agencies as needs were identified. While this was a necessary first step, the gaps which remained in that need to further collaborate on issues grew organically into the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers. We are building off the same successes that collaborative task forces have seen on domestic violence or children's welfare issue in addressing the needs of older adults. This age-inclusive approach ensures that we are supporting two pillars of our community which form the bridge of effective social services: children or young adults and older adults.

Through Mayor Adams' commitment to an age inclusive city and interagency collaborations promoting government efficiency we are fortunate to have the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers. This first of its kind,

multiagency collaborative was created to support the services, projects, and policies that benefit older adults across New York City. The Cabinet for Older New Yorkers first met on September 21, 2022, and included at the time, 17 agencies across New York City intent on coordinating and leveraging shared resources to develop solutions-based initiatives and projects to benefit older adults. During the inaugural meeting of the Cabinet, I was stunned to see that of the principals present a majority of us connected with each other because we are caregivers in some way, many for aging parents. That initial realization of how fundamental aging services is to New York City was just the start of several *aha moments* we have seen throughout the last eighteen months.

As I have previously said to this committee, the Cabinet is not a “white paper” endeavor meant to study demographic or social-societal impacts on an older adult’s life and then simply release a report. We are instead using collective knowledge across member agencies to address real problems that we know about and make a tangible impact on an older adult’s life. And just like the needs of older adults, Cabinet member agencies are diverse and wide-ranging. They span across the entire Administration and a range of government needs, and services provided to New York City. Participating agencies were identified for their overlapping focus areas relevant to older adults and to breakdown any silos between agencies that may have been a hinderance to an older adult’s access to critical services. At present, the Cabinet comprises 24 member agencies including the Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the Police Department (NYPD), Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks), Department of Veterans Services (DVS), and Housing and Preservation and Development (HPD), just to name a few.

There are four working groups, which essentially function like subcommittees: Health, Housing, Intergenerational, and Outreach & Engagement. The working groups are populated with 45 agency staff liaisons who attend regular liaison meetings hosted in-person by NYC Aging. These liaisons the work independently with their counterparts on initiatives developed in those working groups. On a quarterly basis, working group members present initiatives and outcomes to a larger group which include agency heads and commissioners as well as Deputy Mayors. The working groups develop projects which set the groundwork for systemic change and long-term impact, while responding to current gaps and needs. While liaisons regularly attend meetings where they report out on the status of their initiatives, it is incumbent on the liaisons to meet independently and continue working on their pieces ahead of quarterly meetings to principals.

In the past year, these Cabinet initiatives have yielded tangible impacts to older adults by making meaningful changes through agency collaboration that impacts their lives. One incredible example is the steps we have taken to ensure that staff at member agencies are experts on aging services and can see the overlap where their services combine with other needs of an older adult. In the past year, something that Adult Protective Services (APS) had never done, but has now routinized, is to screen older adults for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption when complete intake on clients. Notably, it is through the collaboration with the Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit (PEU) that APS frontline staff are trained in the program’s requirements and learn how to complete applications. Think of how many older adults are now better served when encountering an APS staff member that the City will now be asked if they are a SCRIE tenant, and then will be assisted with completing an application if they qualify. That is the work of the Cabinet actively working together between agencies to combat older adult housing insecurity in New York City.

Similarly, for the NYPD, Deputy Commissioner Mark Stewart, was part of the Cabinet quarterly principal’s meetings since its inception. As Commissioners would organically discuss issues facing older adults, public safety came up repeatedly. Through previous commissions and working groups on domestic violence, the NYPD established a Domestic Violence Officer in each precinct who is trained to handle those specific cases. When Deputy Commissioner Stewart heard of some early ideas regarding making NYPD officers experts in aging issues, it was his presence that pulled that idea across the finish line and saw the creation of NYPD Older Adult Liaisons. Last year on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I was joined by Mayor Adams and leadership from NYPD to announce the assignment of Older Adult Liaisons in every precinct and every police service areas (PSAs) to better enhance public safety for older adults. This shows how important it is to have the correct people in the room as we discuss and develop Cabinet initiatives to really see the great success of these ideas.

Finally, across many agencies, we have seen the power of intergenerational relationships between young people and older adults in combatting ageism. When young people see what older adults experience and feel they too are connected to an older adult's experience, that bond is what breaks cycles of ageism. Through NYC Public Schools (DOE) work on the Cabinet, we have developed an anti-ageism curriculum which has so far taught over 1,350 high school aged New Yorkers and their families to address ageist discrimination at an early age—which is most effective for systemic change. This initiative helped students identify ageism and learn what they can do as youth to stop the perpetuation of ageist stereotypes, which impact both youth and older adults. Our next steps here—which are still underway—is to expand this program to more New York City high schools and begin reaching younger students in middle and elementary schools to further bolster anti-ageism education.

This is true systemization of the work of the cabinet, through our collaborations we were able to bridge a gap in educational understanding to combat a form of discrimination. We believe that this new information on stereotypes helped our future employees and leaders have productive attitudes and behaviors toward their older worker colleagues and employees. This is why we must never pit the needs and services of two vital pillars of our City against one another. Together, younger people and older adults form that bridge in our community and the work of the Cabinet is fundamental to building a stronger society.

### **Next Steps & National Reach**

In 2023, directly because of the work happening with the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, NYC Aging submitted a resolution to the US Conference of Mayors calling on cities to promote and adopt age-inclusive approaches to local policy, practices, and programs in a commitment to achieving an elevated standard of being an age-inclusive city. It is not enough that cities be “Age-Friendly” and while we are so proud that New York City was named as one of the first Age-Friendly Cities in the US, we are pushing further to ensure age inclusiveness across a broad spectrum of needs for older adults. Additionally, through this accepted and ratified resolution, the US Conference of Mayors is working with NYC Aging to convene a *National Age-Inclusive Working Group* which shares information about age-inclusive priorities and identifies potential future challenges for member cities. Some of those cities include Albuquerque, Chicago, Des Moines, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Seattle, among others. We targeted cities across the country that have a large and growing older adult population, much like New York City, and we are meeting regularly with their Area Agencies on Aging to explore collaborative opportunities in addressing the needs of older adults. Next week will be our third such meeting to discuss model programs and models for engagement of older adults.

We look forward to what is in store for the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers. As I stated earlier, our number of partner agencies has grown, and we are deep into Phase Two initiatives. As those initiatives wrap up, we will release another report which will be posted to the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers website which outline those initiatives, their goals, and outcomes. Additionally, NYC Aging is working toward the upcoming release of an Older New Yorker Needs Assessment—a survey—of older adults throughout New York City beyond those who participate in NYC Aging services such as those who attend an OAC. We look to Council's partnership as we inform older New Yorkers about this important survey and hope that you may also be able to host older adults in your offices to complete the survey as well. We have identified key community districts in all five boroughs and will be reaching out to your offices soon to help further develop opportunities to reach older adults.

### **Other Interagency Collaborations**

Beyond the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, NYC Aging continues to find opportunities to work with our partner agencies on a range of issues and initiatives. Some opportunities do not have the reach that a cabinet initiative should typically have, though that does not mean they're any less important. Our work with DOT in the past year to develop walking audits in neighborhoods has deepened our relationship with that agency. As DOT has developed other initiatives, such as their recurring travel surveys, they include older adult perspectives and outreach considerations to ensure they are hearing directly from older adults. Additionally, we have worked with our partners at Department of Finance (DOF) to create a series of events at OACs in targeted

neighborhoods to increase subscription in the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program. This collaboration is recurring and has made an impact on getting information to older adults about a benefit that can have an outsized impact.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, let me close by reiterating how thrilled I am to be here today with you to talk about the great work of the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers. These are proactive, upstream solutions for downstream issues. While we continue to do extensive work to ensure older adults can access our programs as well as other city services, we also recognize that there is always more work to be done. And it takes a village! We will continue to engage our network of aging-service providers, the many advocates we work with, and sister agency colleagues to help in the much-needed outreach efforts which support access to government services. The Cabinet for Older New Yorkers allows us to further break down silos and barriers in service to older adults today and in the future. Thank you, Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee on Aging for your ongoing deep and mutual commitment to older New Yorkers. I look forward to answering any questions.



**Testimony of  
Kevin Jones  
AARP New York**

**NYC Council Committee on Aging**

**Subject: Intro 689**

**April 4, 2024**

**Contact: Kevin Jones (646) 668-7550 | [kjones@arp.org](mailto:kjones@arp.org)**

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the City Council Committee on Aging. My name is Kevin Jones, and I am Deputy Director for Advocacy at AARP New York, which has 750,000 members in New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Older adults are New York's fastest-growing demographic. According to a report from the Center for an Urban Future, New York City's 65-and-over population grew by 36 percent—or more than 363,000 people—between 2011 and 2021.

Older adults are a tremendous asset to our city and play a driving force in our economy, cultural life, and volunteer base. Still, they face many significant challenges that require unique policy solutions. Older adults trust that the City will meet their complex needs by providing resources and protection through the work of dozens of city agencies.

However, government policies, programs, and practices often perpetuate ageism. This happens across city agencies and services. The city fails to deliver older adults the services they need and deserve because most agencies do not have a formal mechanism to coordinate with NYC Aging to ensure programs work for older people.

AARP NY has developed a blueprint with recommendations to make New York City a better place for older adults to live in as they age. Our recommendations address the most significant gaps in services for older adults, including some of the priorities we are advocating for in this year's budget – including increased investment in home-delivered meals and adequate capital funding to meet the infrastructure needs of older adult centers. Yet, without adequate coordination of services among government agencies, these policy solutions are not possible.

That is why we support the legislation this committee is considering today, Int. No. 689, which would codify a Cabinet for Older New Yorkers. This multiagency cabinet, made up of the commissioners of city agencies or their designees and chaired by the commissioner of the Department for the Aging, would facilitate inter-agency collaboration to improve services for older adults.

The Cabinet for Older New Yorkers will allow city agencies to seek coordination and efficiency across departments, leverage resources, and shape current and future services to better serve older adults, address ageism, and make New York City more age-friendly. We hope that this cabinet will eliminate the silos between city agencies when it comes to serving older New Yorkers. The city must focus on improving and expanding opportunities for older adults while also taking steps to reduce ageism. The cabinet will provide much-needed cooperation to ensure that people can safely, affordably, and happily grow older in the communities they love.

Thank you.



## TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

**Before the New York City Council Aging Committee  
Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Oversight - Interagency Coordination on Older Adult Issues  
A Cabinet for Older New Yorkers**

**April 4, 2024**

**Submitted by:  
Jeanette Estima  
Director, Policy and Advocacy  
Citymeals on Wheels**

Citymeals on Wheels works in partnership with the City and the network of home-delivered meal providers to fill a significant gap in its home-delivered meals program by funding the delivery of meals on weekends, holidays, and emergencies, alongside supplemental food and social connection programs. In addition, Citymeals has also become a citywide emergency food responder for homebound older adults, beginning with 9/11 and continuing to the present day.

**Citymeals strongly supports Intro. 689 as it will codify an important effort to improve interagency collaboration, remove bureaucratic barriers, and better serve New York City's older adults.**

The Cabinet for Older Adults was created in September 2022 to bring various City agencies together with NYC Aging to facilitate the coordination required to address the intersectional

issues facing older adults. Currently, New York City has over 1.77 million residents aged 60+ – this is 20.8% of our city’s population and that number is only expected to increase. Older New Yorkers are also diverse: 39% are white, 23% are Hispanic, 21% are Black, and 14% are Asian. Half speak a language other than English at home, the top three of which are Spanish, Chinese, and Russian. While their median income is \$59,590, 17.2% live below the federal poverty line—for a household of one person—that’s an income under \$15,000. About 29% reported some level of disability, from mobility limitations to cognitive difficulties to hearing or vision loss. As many older adults age they become more socially isolated: 48% of New Yorkers 85 years and older live alone. And poverty rates are significantly higher for older adults who live alone (37%) than those who live with others (12%).

All of these data point to a wide range of issues that can impact an older New Yorker’s ability to age in place safely, with dignity, and connected to their communities. As this population grows, the City must streamline and facilitate the interagency collaboration necessary to address these issues. Therefore, the Older Adults Cabinet must continue in perpetuity and with a defined reporting process that ensures it can be an effective, transparent, and accountable force advocating for older adults within the Mayor’s Office.

One example of an area where interagency collaboration is needed is the maintenance of older adult centers housed in NYCHA buildings. These centers struggle to maintain a state of good repair, and some have even been rendered inoperable, because the lack of a formal partnership between NYCHA and NYC Aging has created a barrier to getting capital funding. The Cabinet for Older Adults can and should help to address issues like this.

Therefore, Citymeals supports Int. No. 689 to codify the Cabinet for Older Adults and ensure its longevity, and offers the following recommendations:

1. **Quarterly meetings:** Int. No. 689 mandates that the cabinet meet every 6 months. We believe that meeting quarterly will help ensure that interagency conversations are ongoing and able to meet issues that arise in a timely manner.
2. **Create working groups:** Meeting quarterly may prove challenging for agency officials, and requiring their presence when discussing issues completely outside of their purview may discourage engagement. Therefore, we recommend the creation of issue-based working groups within the cabinet that can focus on specific issues without requiring a meeting of the full cabinet. Smaller groups can also meet independently outside of the regular meeting schedule in order to facilitate deeper collaboration and push out solutions in a timely fashion.
3. **Additional agencies to include:** Citymeals recommends adding the following agencies to the Aging Cabinet:
  - a. The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice should be included to address the unique needs of older adults who are justice-involved or exiting the system;
  - b. The Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC should be included to support innovations in services and programs for older adults;
  - c. The Community Affairs Unit should be included as older adults who are socially isolated or homebound face barriers to engaging in City government;
  - d. The Mayor's Office of Food Policy should be included because older adults experience food insecurity at extremely high rates but cannot access many of the city's food programs;
  - e. Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health should be included to address the very low utilization rates of mental health services among older New Yorkers, especially those who are homebound;
  - f. NYC Service should be included to support targeted engagement with older adults and community connections for those who may be socially isolated;
  - g. The Commission on Human Rights should be included to address the ageism that marginalizes older adults; and,

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- h. The Department of Consumer and Worker Protection should be included to ensure thorough protection of older workers and all older New Yorkers who are often targets for scams.
- i. The Brooklyn, New York, and Queens library systems should be included as they are community hubs for older adults and critical partners in engaging them.

We thank the members of the Aging Committee for your continued partnership in tackling the wide-ranging issues impacting older New Yorkers.

**Testimony of Housing Works**  
Before  
**The New York City Council Committee on Aging** Regarding  
**Oversight: Interagency Coordination on Older Adult Issues**  
April 4, 2024

Thank you, Chairperson Hudson, and members of the NYC Council Committee on Aging, for the opportunity to testify today in support of Intro No. 869, to establish a Cabinet for Older New Yorkers to facilitate coordination across agencies to address age-related barriers and inequities in the provision of services to older adults and work to make future initiatives inclusive of older adults. I come before you to highlight the critical importance of ensuring this type of coordination to meet the unique needs of older New Yorkers living with and vulnerable to HIV infection.

My name is Valerie Reyes-Jimenez, and I am the NYC Community Organizer for Housing Works, a healing community of people living with and affected by HIV. Founded in 1990 with a mission to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS, Housing Works currently provides a full range of integrated medical, behavioral health, housing, and support services for over 15,000 low-income New Yorkers annually, with a focus on the most marginalized and underserved—those facing the challenges of homelessness, HIV, mental health issues, substance use disorder, other chronic conditions, and incarceration. More than half of New Yorkers living with HIV are over the age of 50, and Housing Works, like other NYC HIV service providers, are working hard to identify and meet the unique medical, housing, and psycho-social needs of older people with HIV like me.

I came to Housing Works in 1991, homeless, and at the lowest point in my life. I was twenty-six years old. I am proud to report that in the thirty-two years since I lost my husband to AIDS, I have raised two terrific kids, and a granddaughter. Now at fifty-nine-years-old I work full-time in their Advocacy Department. I am a Native New Yorker as are my children and grandchild. I never expected to see my son turn two years old, much less thirty-six. My daughter is forty-one, and a High School math teacher, who once worked at our syringe exchange program. I have a fierce, 21-year-old granddaughter and being alive with them is beyond my wildest dreams.

We are grateful to the Council for always supporting the vital implementation of the Ending the HIV Epidemic (EtE) Initiative, which helped make it possible to “bend the curve” in 2019 by decreasing HIV prevalence for the first time since the epidemic began. But while the data shows continued overall progress, stark and unacceptable disparities persist in HIV’s impact in certain communities, including older New Yorkers.

As of December 2022, some 57 percent of NYC residents living with diagnosed HIV were 50 years old or older, and given New York’s excellent HIV treatment system and declining rates of new infections, this percentage is likely to increase dramatically over the coming decade. It is troubling, though, that 16 percent of new HIV diagnoses in NYC during 2022 were among people who were 50 or older, and that, of these, 26.5 percent were simultaneously diagnosed with AIDS. This rate of concurrent diagnosis is significantly higher than for other NYC residents who are newly diagnosed.

We clearly need better coordination across systems to improve HIV prevention and early diagnosis among older New Yorkers. One piece of data jumps out regarding new infections among older adults. While all new infections are overwhelmingly among Black and Latinx New Yorkers, there are a significantly higher percentage of new infections among older adults through heterosexual transmission. One potential factor is the percentage of heterosexual older adults who are widowed or are otherwise ending long-term relationships

and becoming involved with new sex partners. These people are often completely unaware of their risk of HIV infection. Clearly, there is a need for direct sex education among older adults that speaks specifically to HIV risk and that introduces Pre-and post- exposure prophylaxis. In addition, we must scale up PrEP among older adults, particularly among Black New Yorkers and other older New Yorkers of Color.

It is also apparent that we need to dramatically increase HIV testing among older adults. Older adults can easily mistake symptoms of HIV for symptoms of other conditions common to older people. At the same time, medical providers all too often make assumptions about the lack of sexual activity by their older patients, rather than having honest open conversations about their patients' sexual behaviors. If a provider is uncomfortable discussing sex, that same provider is likely to be just as uncomfortable suggesting an HIV test. Conversations about sex are critical, but, meanwhile, facilitating routine, universal opt-out HIV testing in primary care and emergency room settings would be an important step to identify more older people with HIV earlier in their infection.

Timely testing is less likely if people do not have health insurance coverage, a serious issue for undocumented immigrants, who may not be aware of our state PrEP Assistance Program, free HIV testing and the AIDS Drug Assistance Program for people who test positive. In New York State, Medicaid coverage was just expanded this recent January 1<sup>st</sup> to include low-income undocumented immigrants who are 65 or older. We need to work together to ensure that people who might benefit from this expanded coverage are made aware of their eligibility and that they receive assistance applying with their local social service agency, HRA, here in New York City. But undocumented adults between the ages of 19 and 64 still do not have access to health insurance coverage, so we still need to fight at the State level for Coverage for All legislation, which if passed, would also allow immigrants who are not low-income to buy into New York State's Essential Plan up to an income of 250% of poverty.

For older adults who are newly diagnosed, immediate access to treatment should be imperative. Unfortunately, the data shows significantly fewer older adults get started on treatment within 30 days of a new diagnosis than other persons. Consequently, it takes more time for older adults to become virally suppressed than it does for other people. This can have implications for the health of these people as well as increasing the likelihood that they will transmit the virus to others.

Even when HIV infection is well controlled, people with HIV may develop aging-related conditions at a younger age than they otherwise would. HIV and its treatment can affect other parts of the body, such as the brain and the heart. For example, people living with HIV are significantly more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than people without HIV. Older people living with HIV also have an increased risk of dementia, diabetes, osteoporosis, frailty, and some cancers. Older adults with HIV may also be more likely to fall and experience debilitating injury as a consequence.

It's common for older adults with HIV to experience mental illness, especially depression and substance use disorder. These can be easily overlooked as their impacts may be seen as merely signs of aging. Compounding all these conditions is that as adults grow older, they tend to lose their former social networks. In fact, those who were a part of the pre-treatment waves of the epidemic may have lost many of their peers to the epidemic early on and be burdened by survivors' guilt.

Whatever the case, older adults generally tend to be more isolated. This isolation can be particularly hard to overcome for older adults living with HIV. HIV status, sexual orientation or a history of substance use may

make it more difficult to find acceptance in venues such as senior centers, senior housing or even in long term care facilities. Furthermore, few of these programs offer vocational opportunity, which is an avenue that many older people living with HIV desire. So, how do we address all these issues?

New York must act urgently across agencies and systems of care to address the complex medical and social needs of long-term survivors and older New Yorkers living with HIV. For starters, even without the complications of HIV, we have a tremendous shortage of gerontologists in New York, much less gerontologists who are trained in HIV treatment and care. We recommend the establishment of clinical centers of excellence on HIV and aging like the one established at Weil Cornell Medical College, which integrates the work of its geriatrics program with its HIV program for cross-learning as well as direct consultation.

The same type of training program is needed for staff providing HIV case management, outreach, mental health, and substance use services, and other psychological and social support. All these services must be shaped for a geriatric population, a concept that is fairly new to the field of HIV services. Meanwhile, we must be providing training for staff of senior services venues to better equip them to engage and serve people living with HIV, this must include training on serving people of different sexual orientations and gender identities as well as serving people who have long histories of substance use.

Finally, we need to scale up distinct programs that specifically focus on the services and care of older adults living with HIV, ranging from adult day health care to intense case management, to vocational programs that target opportunities for older adults. In fact, if we are serious about meeting the needs of this population, both the City and State Departments of Health need to collaborate in support of the development of Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (or “PACE” programs) that are specifically designed to serve elderly people living with HIV and other co-morbid conditions. Only by intensively scaling up staff training and dedicated services, are we going to be able to address the needs of the growing number of older adults living with HIV.

I take one pill a day for HIV which ironically enough, is the least of my problems. The other fistful of medications I take daily are for severe chronic pain, depression, anxiety, nerve damage, muscle spasms, migraines, and more. Yet I consider myself healthy despite these increasingly complex medical issues – many are HIV related and others are simply the result of aging. But I am fortunate to have a stable, affordable place to live, a loving family and work that I care passionately about. I work each day to advance social justice and health equity for the thousands of older New Yorkers living with HIV who struggle daily to survive and thrive in the face of homelessness or housing instability, extreme poverty, social isolation, and complex medical needs. What we have learned at Housing Works is that older people with HIV require integrated care which includes regular screenings and interventions to identify and address the cumulative economic and social disadvantages that contribute to inequities in aging. Only a coordinated and thoughtful effort can make that possible.

Thank you.

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Making New York a better place to age

**New York City Council**

**Committee on Aging**

**Chair Hudson**

**April 4, 2024**

**NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers**

My name is Kevin Kiprovski and I am the Director of Public Policy at LiveOn NY. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LiveOn NY's members include more than 110 community-based nonprofits that provide core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our communities as we age, such as older adult centers, home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, NORCs, and home care. LiveOn NY is also home to the Reframing Aging NYC Initiative, part of the national Reframing Aging Initiative aimed to counteract ageism and improve the way policymakers, stakeholders, and the public think about aging and older people. With our members, we work to make New York a better place to age.

### **Background**

Aging affects all areas of our city, and we need to have all agencies recognize that and act accordingly.

The Cabinet for Older New Yorkers has been a key policy priority for LiveOn NY and our partners at the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging for many years and we were very excited in 2022 when it was convened by this administration. We would like to thank NYC Aging for their commitment to this cabinet and their efforts to create a whole of government approach to aging through this cabinet.

In partnership with Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, we created a policy agenda called "Aging is Everyone's Business: Policies for Building a New York for All Ages" that covers services including housing, technology, healthcare, social engagement, financial security, and age friendly design for physical spaces. We would invite the council and the cabinet to review these recommendations and include them in policies across all sectors of the city.

**LiveOn NY fully supports the proposed legislation, Intro 0689 that would formalize the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers and thanks Chair Hudson for her commitment to making the city a better place to age.**

### **Recommendations**

- **NYCHA and NYC Aging should partner on a capital repair project to bring older adult centers in NYCHA developments into a state of good repair.** We have members who currently have inoperable centers in NYCHA spaces which can be fixed through interagency initiatives.



Making New York a better place to age

- **NYCHA and NYC Aging should partner to create clear guidelines for service providers operating in RAD-PACT developments.** We have heard that developments converted to RAD-PACT sites have created confusion and difficulties for providers operating in those spaces. We have heard that the new property managers do not know their responsibilities for these sites and can be difficult to work with.
- **HPD and NYC Aging should partner to explore new ways to provide sustainable and accessible housing to older adults.** Providers in low density neighborhoods have piloted successful co-living projects that provide healthier and more affordable housing particularly in immigrant communities, but HPD regulations often make it difficult to get city buy-in to expand them.
- **HPD and NYC Aging should explore service models that provide deeper service within older adult housing developments.** Many older adults benefit immensely from light touch services in their housing developments as proven through many of our members' housing with services model. Partnership between the two agencies can increase awareness of how impactful and cost effective these programs are.
- **The Council and the Cabinet should utilize the “Aging is Everyone’s Business” report as a framework to create a just city that allows older New Yorkers to stay in their homes and thrive in their communities.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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*Testimony provided by Kevin Kiproviski, Director of Public Policy at LiveOn NY For questions, please email [kkiproviski@liveon-ny.org](mailto:kkiproviski@liveon-ny.org)*

*LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.*

*LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.*



**MET  
COUNCIL**

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**Oversight Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Aging  
April 4, 2024**

Chair Hudson and fellow members of the Committee on Aging, thank you for taking the time to hold this oversight hearing on interagency coordination on older adult issues. My name is Ruth Stein; I am an attorney at the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, focusing on elder abuse legal services. I'm here today to express support for local law 689.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments ranging from 100% affordable housing to our award-winning family violence program to comprehensive Holocaust Survivor assistance, other senior programming, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher emergency food network. In total, we provide a wide array of support to over 320,000 clients a year, many of whom are older adults.

Met Council plays a unique role in the older adult services space by offering a remarkably wide breadth of services to older adults: Elder Abuse Prevention Program (including the DFTA Elder Justice contract for Brooklyn South), family caregiver support, geriatric case management & case assistance, social work services in Met Council's low-income senior housing buildings and at our community center sites in Brooklyn, Holocaust Survivor services including grocery home delivery, and home repair services for seniors. We are committed to serving any New Yorker in need, and we support all who require our services regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

**Met Council unequivocally supports local law 689 that calls for the formation of an interagency council whose function will be to provide interagency collaboration to improve services for older New Yorkers.** Currently there is no formalized coordination amongst the various public systems providing services to older adults. Providing services in silos does not allow for an integration of services, which leads to both duplication of services and systems that are at odds with one another.

All too often, vulnerable seniors fall through the cracks because existing systems are confusing and cumbersome. It is our hope that this Council will address ways of simplifying the systems, making it easier for older New Yorkers to access the services they need. Local law 689 is a promising step towards this vision.

Our Elder Abuse Prevention Program works with some of the most vulnerable older New Yorkers who interact with the social service system, legal system, healthcare system, and housing systems. Policies currently in existence often re-traumatize rather than support these



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clients. Coordination between the various systems would strengthen the City's ability to better support these vulnerable seniors.

I would like to share an example of a Met Council client who suffered because of a lack of coordination:

Edith [pseudonym] was referred to us by the Brooklyn District Attorney's office. She had been assaulted after a verbal altercation with her brother, who shares their family home. They were not able to pursue further legal action, and we were advised to get the client a Family Court Order of Protection. Although this procedure is used to protect clients, her brother took out a counter Order of Protection against his sister. He has since called NYPD and made false statements against her – complaints that have gotten her arrested several times. Having an Order of Protection taken out against him has not prevented her brother from taking abusive action. He instead uses his to harass our client, and it is difficult to ensure that she is safe in the home. Because her income is extremely low, there are limited choices for alternate housing placements. With interagency coordination Edith's Order of Protection could be honored and monitored by NYPD, APS, the District Attorney's office, and/or her Met Council social worker so she could stay safely in her home.

We fully support codifying a Cabinet for Older New Yorkers, and we hope to see progress towards interagency coordination.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Ruth Stein  
Social Services Attorney, Elder Abuse Prevention Project  
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

## **NYC Council - Committee on Aging Hearing**

**April 4, 2024**

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Hudson and the Committee on Aging for holding this important hearing today and for your leadership in supporting the needs of older adults in New York.

My name is Coleton Whitaker, and I am the Director of In-Person Experiences with Older Adults Technology Services, or OATS, from AARP. OATS is an award-winning social impact organization that offers technology programs, community training, and strategic engagements to shape the future of aging.

OATS is also the creator of Senior Planet, a national program that helps older adults aged 60 and over thrive in the digital world and use technology to improve their daily lives in five areas of impact: social engagement, financial security, civic participation, health, and creativity. OATS' flagship Senior Planet center opened in Manhattan in 2013, and in the past decade has provided older New Yorkers with a warm, welcoming community space to learn, use innovative technology, and be entrepreneurial.

The center has a robust computer lab, an open-seating style working space, and cutting-edge technology readily available that older adults can touch and experience for themselves. OATS has historically and currently received funding from the New York City Department For The Aging to operate the Senior Planet center in Chelsea and widely successful programming at partner sites around the city through the Connected Communities initiative. As the oversight City agency for older adult services, DFTA plays a crucial role - sitting at the intersection of older adults and city services.

That's why I am here today to speak in support of the expanded inter-agency collaboration to improve services for older New Yorkers across the city, specifically through [Intro 689](#).

Formalizing stronger collaboration across agencies, alongside DFTA, will help eliminate age-related barriers and inequities in the provision of services to older adults while also reviewing current and future initiatives to ensure that they are fair and inclusive of older New Yorkers. Our hope, is that in addition to this greater collaboration as specified, there will be also be a stronger commitment to collaborative data collection and of course representation of Older New Yorkers on the cabinet – which are key areas of importance.

To put into perspective, despite our growing reliance on technology, we know that 22 million older Americans remain on the wrong side of the digital divide. At OATS, we're on a mission to change that by working to empower older adults with the skills needed to harness the power of today's technology. Being online not only connects you to the world, it has the ability to connect older adults with answers to questions, solutions to needs, and tools to thrive while aging.

A recent report our organization released found strong evidence that technology interventions can play a significant role in driving behavioral social change for older adults: helping them combat social isolation, loneliness and depression, all while improving quality of life. In a world where interactions are increasingly taking place online, giving older adults the tools to use modern technology could greatly improve their lives, giving them access to not just important resources like public health information, but to the social communities they depend on as well.

New York City is known for the strength and resilience of its diverse communities. That includes our vibrant community of older adults, who deserve to thrive and benefit from today's innovative technologies and resources.

[689](#) is a positive step towards combatting the digital divide among New York's older adults working collectively amongst key agencies and in stronger coordination. Thus, providing seniors the skills and knowledge to actively participate in our digital economy—and to connect with the ones they love—the codification of a Cabinet for Older New Yorkers can pave an exciting and necessary collaborative path forward for New York's older adult community, and, in turn, the city as a whole.

Thank you for your time.

**New York City Council  
Committee on Aging  
Chair Hudson  
April 4, 2024  
NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers**

My name is Floyd Rumohr and I am the Interim Director of Riverdale Senior Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

RSS serves the northwest Bronx at our center in Riverdale, out in the surrounding communities and online to older adults across the five boroughs. We are proud to be celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of providing innovative programs, enriching meals, an Adult Day Program for those with Memory Loss and critical social services to older adults.

Aging affects all areas of our city, and we need to have all agencies recognize that and act accordingly.

**RSS fully supports the proposed legislation, Intro 0689 that would formalize the Cabinet for Older New Yorkers and thanks Chair Hudson for her commitment to making the city a better place to age.**

**Recommendations**

- **NYCHA and NYCAging should partner on a capital repair project to bring older adult centers in NYCHA developments into a state of good repair.** We have members who currently have inoperable centers in NYCHA spaces which can be fixed through interagency initiatives. Currently, the City's capital grants requirements for centers operating within leased premises functionally prohibit improvement projects because of stringent lien requirements for landlords.
- **NYCHA and NYCAging should partner to create clear guidelines for service providers operating in RAD-PACT developments.** We have heard that developments converted to RAD-PACT sites have created confusion and difficulties for providers operating in those spaces. We have heard that the new property managers do not know their responsibilities for these sites and can be difficult to work with.
- **HPD and NYCAging should partner to explore new ways to provide sustainable and accessible housing to older adults.** Providers in low density neighborhoods have piloted successful co-living projects that provide healthier and more affordable housing particularly in immigrant communities, but HPD regulations often make it difficult to get city buy-in to expand them.
- **HPD and NYCAging should explore service models that provide deeper service within older adult housing developments.** Many older adults benefit immensely from light touch services in their housing developments as proven through many of our members' housing with services model. Partnership between the two agencies can increase awareness of how impactful and cost effective these programs are.

- **The Council and the Cabinet should utilize the “Aging is Everyone’s Business” report as a framework to create a just city that allows older New Yorkers to stay in their homes and thrive in their communities.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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*Testimony provided by Floyd Rumohr, Interim Executive Director, Riverdale Senior Services.  
For questions, please email [frumohr@rssny.org](mailto:frumohr@rssny.org)*



The Harry and Jeanette  
**Weinberg Center for Elder Justice**  
AT THE HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE

*Testimony of*  
**The Weinberg Center for Elder Justice**  
*Before the*  
**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Aging**  
*Regarding*  
**Cabinet for Older New Yorkers**

**April 4, 2024**

Good Afternoon Chair Hudson and members of the committee. I am John Holt, the Senior Staff Attorney for The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Justice at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale. As a multi-disciplinary provider of shelter services to older adults who have experienced harm, we at The Weinberg Center see every day the impact that coordinated responses across government and non-government systems have in assisting survivors of elder abuse. We work closely with city partners in a variety of forums, including participating in elder abuse multi-disciplinary teams and the Age Friendly NYC Commission, collaborating with the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence and the Department for the Aging, and providing training on elder abuse to the NYPD. By identifying the interconnected legal, medical, mental-health, long term care, social, spiritual, and emotional needs of the older adults we serve, The Weinberg Center is able to craft tailored solutions that connect them to appropriate resources and help them build supported, safe, and sustainable futures, free from harm.

The Weinberg Center supports the council's proposal to apply this same holistic approach to meeting the needs of older adults on a city-wide level through the establishment of a cabinet for older New Yorkers. As older adults move through the stages of their lives they experience changes in their finances, housing needs, benefits eligibility, physical and cognitive functioning, and social and familial



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The Harry and Jeanette  
**Weinberg Center for Elder Justice**  
AT THE HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE

circles that create substantial challenges to safely remaining in the community. In order to effectively meet these evolving needs, older New Yorkers rely on complementary and layered city services provided by the agencies represented on the proposed cabinet. However in many instances the same life changes that create the need for accessing city services create barriers to obtaining them. Identifying the ways in which older adults are effected by policies and procedures and offering concrete and actionable plans to reduce barriers across the full spectrum of city agencies and systems is critical in ensuring that all older New Yorkers have fair and equitable access regardless of their age, functional status, communicative abilities, care needs, or financial resources.

The Weinberg Center strongly encourages the cabinet to incorporate elder justice principals and an understanding of the relationship between accessibility and elder abuse in fulfilling its mission to ensure equitable access for older adults to city services. It is estimated that 1 and 10 older adults experience some form of elder abuse each year, but in spite of the prevalence of harm experienced by older New Yorkers, studies have shown only approximately 1 in every 24 instances of abuse are ever reported. In New York, city agencies and their employees are on the front line, interacting with older adults who may be at risk of abuse or currently experiencing harm that they are unable to recognize or unwilling to report.

The Weinberg Center has pioneered elder abuse detection and intervention programming that has clearly demonstrated that responses based in an understanding of the experiences of older adults, the dynamics of abuse, and knowledge of available resources are effective in ending and preventing harm. We have successfully implemented evidence based elder abuse screening tools to help identify abuse for all newly admitted residents of the



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The Harry and Jeanette  
**Weinberg Center for Elder Justice**  
AT THE HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE

Hebrew Home, built a training program that has provided education and resources to thousands of professionals across the city working with older adults, and created a restorative justice-based protocol to assist older adults seeking to repair relationships with those who caused them harm. We call upon the cabinet to consider creating similar initiatives within the member agencies such as the creation of elder abuse screening tools for use at critical service delivery touch points, staff training on elder abuse detection, increased focus on outreach to lonely and isolated older adults, and inter-agency coordination of responses to reported or suspected harm. Such initiatives would help broaden access to City-provided services and ensure they become more dynamic tools in preventing abuse. We sincerely thank the City Council and the Committee on Aging for your work to support older adults and create systems that better meet their needs.



We are leaders in a global network of elder abuse shelters. For more information, visit [springalliance.org](http://springalliance.org)

## WEST SIDE FEDERATION FOR SENIOR AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

[www.wsfssh.org](http://www.wsfssh.org)



New York City Council  
Committee on Aging  
Chair Hudson  
April 4, 2024

My name is Eustacia Smith, and I am the Director of Advocacy at West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH.) Thank you to Chair Hudson and the entire committee on Aging for all your work to support older New Yorkers.

WSFSSH echoes LiveOn's recommendations that HPD and NYCAging partner to explore new ways to provide sustainable and accessible housing to older adults and explore service models that provide deeper service within older adult housing developments.

WSFSSH supports the legislation to formalize a Cabinet for Older New Yorkers and sees this as an important step towards service coordination and removing barriers to increasing the supply of services.

WSFSSH houses over 2,500 people in permanent affordable housing, primarily for older adults, and operates a shelter for homeless adults over the age of 50. In addition, we have 3 Older Adult Centers located within our affordable senior housing, and one small Older Adult Center in NYCHA's Douglas Houses. These Older Adult Centers provide invaluable services to the residents of the building where they are co-located, as well as to other residents in the community. The centers provide socialization, recreational and educational activities and nutritional services. The Centers also provide a range of case management and social services, including assistance with complicated entitlement programs, access to healthcare, mental health services, and housing recertifications and referrals.

Housing and aging services are so complementary to each other, and each is so important to making the other work well, that in fact they really can't be thought of as "separate." So HPD and NYCAging should be a natural partnership. The services provided through the Older Adult Centers in WSFSSH housing are vital to keeping residents housed in the community for much longer periods of their life than would otherwise occur without services, avoiding hospital and rehab stays and other higher levels of care, which in addition to being institutional, are much more costly. We urge HPD and NYCAging to work together to increase the services provided in senior housing.

WSFSSH has also seen a growing demand for services in our Older Adult Centers. Our numbers are increasing. We need our resources from the city to increase to keep up with our demand for services from participants.

While we appreciate the efforts of the city to increase the general housing supply, given that seniors make up the fastest growing population of homeless people, we strongly urge the Committee on Aging to work together with the administration and push the city to develop more senior affordable housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

*Testimony prepared by Eustacia Smith, Director of Advocacy, WSFSSH, who can be reached at [esmith@wsfssh.org](mailto:esmith@wsfssh.org) or 212-721-6032 ex 1007.*

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Testimony of  
**The Legal Aid Society**  
on  
Oversight: Interagency Coordination on Older Adult Issues  
presented before

The New York City Council's Committee on Aging

Jeannine R. Cahill-Jackson  
Director of Elder Law  
Civil Practice  
The Legal Aid Society

April 4, 2024

The Legal Aid Society appreciates the opportunity to comment on the subject of interagency coordination for older New Yorkers and thanks the Committee on Aging for convening this hearing.

### **Who We Are**

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, was founded in 1876 to provide free legal representation to marginalized New York City families and individuals. The Legal Aid Society's legal program operates three major practices – Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights – and through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel. With a caseload of nearly 200,00 cases and legal matters for clients, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States.

Our Civil Practice works to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by helping vulnerable families and individuals to obtain and maintain the necessities of life- housing, health care, food, and self-sufficiency. We serve as a “one-stop” legal resource for clients with a broad variety of legal problems, ranging, among others, from government benefits and access to health care, to immigration and domestic violence. Our depth and breadth of experience is unmatched in the legal profession and gives LAS a unique capacity to go beyond any one individual case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals, and broader, more powerful systemic change at a societal level. Our work has always taken an explicit racial and social equity lens and the current housing crisis has further focused our efforts to advocate for the needs of New York's marginalized communities.

Since 1974, The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Office for the Aging (BOFTA) has offered comprehensive legal assistance to older New Yorkers through referrals from the Housing Court, Human Resources Administration, elected officials, and community organizations. BOFTA has used an interdisciplinary legal-social work framework to secure lasting solutions to the often-complex problems facing low-income New Yorkers.

In 2023, The Legal Aid Society created a city-wide Elder Law Unit, combining the Brooklyn Office for the Aging and the Bronx Assigned Counsel Project, which together, currently includes a robust, multi-disciplinary team specializing in eviction defense for seniors in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The preservation of housing for a senior often involves many

intersecting medical, financial, and social issues. The Elder Law Unit seeks to address all issues needed to allow the senior to not only prevent their eviction but to alleviate the underlying causes that lead to the eviction in the first place.

### **Support for Creation of Interagency Cabinet to Improve Services for Older New Yorkers**

The Legal Aid Society supports proposed bill Int. No. 689, which seeks to institute an interagency cabinet to eliminate age related barriers in the provision of services to older adults and to review initiatives to ensure they are inclusive of older adults.

In the Elder Law Practice, we frequently see that housing court is a system that catches seniors who have fallen through the cracks leaving them socially isolated, without adequate food, medical care, access to phone and/or internet. Additionally, they are often struggling with declining cognitive capacity and/or mental health. These older New Yorkers are often in great need for assistance in many areas of their life and are at risk of facing grave consequences for not being able to manage on their own. However, even at this dire time, are often unable to determine if there is help available, and if so, how they might access it. Accordingly, a cabinet dedicated to identifying and rectifying these issues could be vital to the health, safety, and quality of life of so many older New Yorkers that may otherwise have fallen through the cracks.

### **Cabinet Should Include Members from Legal Services Providers and Community Based Organizations**

Legal Service Providers and other Community Based Organizations that engage in the provision of direct services to low-income older New Yorkers can provide insight into the barriers older New Yorkers are facing to access services as well as identify gaps in service through their experience on the ground with their clients. Each senior's situation and barriers are unique. However, as a direct service provider, The Legal Aid Society can spot common areas of need and barriers that exist, as well as what services may be seriously needed but are not available. We believe that organizations with this direct experience should be included into the cabinet and could provide invaluable insight as illustrated through the points raised below and the client stories that have helped lead us to identify these needs of older New Yorkers and gaps in services that are available.

Should the cabinet be expanded to include other organizations that serve older New Yorkers, The Legal Aid Society would welcome the opportunity to participate.

**Significant Impact of Legal Services Providers in Ability for Older New Yorkers Facing Eviction to Access Benefits and Services and Need to Fund Full Implementation of Right to Counsel**

One hugely impactful way that the City Council can ensure that older New Yorkers are able to connect to the city agencies necessary to obtain all the benefits and other assistance they are eligible for at a pivotal time in their life, is to fully fund Right to Counsel.

Each day many older New Yorkers still must face the threat of eviction in Housing Court without the assistance of counsel. The Legal Aid Society, Elder Law Unit has a unique vantage point to this situation in that our clients come to us primarily through the Office of Civil Justice at HRA and direct Housing Court judicial referrals. These are seniors that were not able to obtain counsel initially through Right to Counsel and many of whom have subsequently endured months of their eviction proceeding *Pro Se* leading to confusion, fear, and often no meaningful progress towards resolving their case and preserving their tenancy.

In our experience, housing court is the system that catches many of the most vulnerable older New Yorkers, who have fallen through the cracks leaving them socially isolated, without adequate food, medical care, access to phone and/or internet. Additionally, they are often struggling with declining cognitive capacity and/or mental health. As a result, a core aspect of our multi-disciplinary effort to preserve the tenancy and alleviate the often complex underlying financial, medical and social issues leading to the eviction largely involves assisting the senior with obtaining, correcting or reinstating various benefits and assistance to stabilize them and allow them to continue to live in the community.

Currently, we do not have the capacity to provide full legal representation to all of the seniors referred to our Elder Law Unit through the housing courts and the Office for Civil Justice at HRA. This is a stress felt by the legal services programs across the city which all continue to manage the demand for representation which exceeds current capacity. As a result, many vulnerable low-income older New Yorkers continue to have to face the threat of eviction and the maze of city agencies alone.

Due to the current inadequate funding for the Right to Counsel program, after these seniors are initially unable to obtain representation after their first appearance, they may be referred to the LAS Elder Law Unit, where they are still not guaranteed representation, as we receive far more referrals, particularly in the Bronx, than we have capacity to represent. Leaving some seniors being told a second time that they are not able to obtain legal representation, despite their need, due to lack of organizational capacity and having to navigate the ever-challenging landscape of accessing assistance through HRA, and any other assistance they may require. And with the expansion of Right to Counsel to extend to all older New Yorkers, this has simply created a volume of cases that we do not have the capacity to take and a greater need for funding.

The City's proposed case rate, in the current RFX, of \$3,063 is less than half of what is needed. Data collected by legal services providers shows that an eviction case costs on average \$7,500<sup>4</sup> to defend including properly staffing the work with attorneys, sufficient paralegals, and social workers; pay parity; and caseloads of 41 cases per attorney in line with what was identified by the Office of Court Administration.<sup>5</sup> Based on the average cost per case, the increased cost of the program is closer to \$457 million – \$7,500 per case for 79,033 cases less the current funding of \$136 million. It is clear that the City needs to allocate a sizable amount for FY 25 and then more over time so legal service providers have a realistic chance to hire staff and budget for other logistical and administrative costs associated with expansion.

The insufficient funding provided by the City have forced the provider community to limit staffing needed for holistic representation (including lawyers, social workers, paralegals, process servers and administrative support necessary to manage a fully implemented RTC program), and to forgo filling the need for physical space and operational support like finance, grant management, and information technology (IT). The RFX has failed to provide enough funding for even the number of attorneys needed to handle the considerable volume of cases, let alone for the other staffing and infrastructure necessary for a successful RTC program. Without additional funding, the program will continue to have the challenges that it presently is dealing with.

**Need for Coordinated Holistic Person – Centered Assistance for Older New Yorkers**

A maze of city agencies, countless programs with varying qualifications, rules and points of access presents a daunting if not impossible challenge for many older New Yorkers. This cabinet presents a valuable opportunity to make these benefits and programs more easily accessible for older New Yorkers, their families, and advocates. However, through our work with seniors we see clients that [edit this section] qualify income benefits but they don't have them, or they are not the correct amount, or rental subsidies but they can't get them on their own, or they use to have them but they are no longer active for various reasons, or they have health issues that make it so they need particular additional assistance- from nursing care in the home to simply remembering things from day to day to other social issues including those spanning the scope of elder abuse. So, while there is a maze of opportunities for assistance, there are still so many that go without. From this vantage point, The Legal Aid Society has been able to identify some areas where more assistance could be greatly needed.

**Full Eligibility Assessment Needed for All Benefits and Programs as well as Application Assistance**

Some issues that we see regularly are seniors that have not have not applied for of been approved for all benefits they are entitled to. Most low-income seniors receive some benefits but rarely ever all. For example, a senior may be on PA but not know that they can now apply for SSI because they are 65 or older.

Then if they have applied for and obtained the benefit, they may have only done so years after becoming eligible and therefore missed out on a substantial benefit. For example, we have many senior clients come to us that have never applied for SCRIE to freeze their rent – so we help them – and they are approved – however their rent, although frozen, is not affordable to them. However, it would have been lower had they been approved the first year they were eligible. Notably, the frozen rent could still be unaffordable for the senior even if they apply the first year, they are eligible, as the rent is simply frozen, no analysis is provided for based on the income of the household. This could be another area of review for the interagency cabinet, including the Department of Finance.

While this full benefits and income maximization assessment is something we do with our clients to help put them in the best position possible to preserve their tenancies and stabilize their lives, it is not necessary that this be done by attorneys and paralegals, nor as part legal representation. In fact, if this holistic assessment and enrollment assistance was provided prior to emergency situations such as evictions, many such emergencies could be avoided.

### **Assistance Needed to Maintain Ongoing Benefits**

Another issue we see in many of our cases is that after we assist clients in obtaining benefits such as PA, CITYFHEPS, or SCRIE they are enrolled for 1 year. After which they will be required to recertify annually and failure to do so will result in the loss of the benefits, we just helped them obtain. Which can spiral their lives back into the same emergency posture they were just in. There is no recertification assistance provided to seniors on an ongoing basis that receive these benefits.

This gap was highlighted for my office recently in a case in which the senior with significant short term memory loss had ongoing APS financial and case management and APS had previously obtained CITYFHEPS rental assistance. He was facing imminent eviction because his CITYFHEPS has lapsed and we learned APS does not provide assistance with the ongoing recertifications for CITYFHEPS, only the initial applications. This is a substantial gap between the requirements to maintain the benefit and the reality of the needs of many of the recipients. The identification of gaps such as these and a coordinated interagency effort to remedy these gaps would prove hugely beneficial to the most vulnerable low-income older New Yorkers who are unable to manage these procedures and deadlines absent assistance or a elimination of the recertification requirement for the senior.

### **Relocation Assistance is Needed When Senior Must Move Due to Eviction Case**

Unfortunately, sometimes even if the senior can obtain all the benefits, they are eligible, even including CITYFHEPS enabling them to pay ongoing rent, they may need to move, if they live in unregulated housing. These situations are particularly challenging as many of the seniors have lived in the apartment they must leave for decades, and many are disabled or have other challenges. These seniors have a substantial need for assistance in relocating – however there are no programs that provide such assistance. The gap in assistance pertains to the procurement of a

new apartment and the relocation to the new unit. This may seem insignificant, however for the most vulnerable low-income seniors, the barriers may be insurmountable, even if they have sufficient income or a rental voucher. The rental voucher alone only creates the potential to rent an apartment. However, the barriers to renting the apartment begin at access and ability to use the internet to find the apartment all the way through the ability to pack and unpack their belongings, and every step in between. Adult Protective Services doesn't provide this service, and neither do Legal Service Providers. Accordingly, seniors are relegated to try to navigate the complex New York City rental market, rife with income discrimination, on their own or perhaps with a private broker. The gap between the efforts to expand rental vouchers and affordable housing options without the creation of any assistance for the older New Yorkers that are unable to find these units and effectuate moves on their own is a significant one that should be explored.

### **Full Implementation of the CITYFHEPS Expansion**

Until the CITYFHEPS expansion is fully implemented, there are many older New Yorkers the current CITYFHEPS eligibility requirement of being approved for APS services leaves an enormous gap between seniors with long term tenancies and a fixed income in desperate need for ongoing rental assistance and seniors who also fit the narrow requirements for APS assistance. For example, a client has a granddaughter who comes to visit her and the spend time together as companions. The client cannot afford her ongoing rent and otherwise qualifies for CITYFHEPS, except that APS determined that she was not eligible for services because she has a granddaughter that can help her. However, one of the many gaps illustrated by this situation, is that she was denied APS services because there is someone willing to help her, however there is no analysis as to what type of help that is needed and whether that individual can in fact provide it. In this case, the granddaughter can keep her grandmother company but cannot pay the rent, but because of this companionship, the grandmother is foreclosed from obtaining rental assistance.

As per the Community Service Society's analysis of the 2017 Housing Vacancy Survey (HVS), there are 9,463 rent-regulated apartments with low-income tenants who are severely rent-burdened and have a head of household over the age of 65. However, these households, some of which rely on Public Assistance, do not currently qualify for CITYFHEPS, due to the failure to implement the expansion. This trend continues, as demonstrated in the 2021 HVS which further indicates that more than 40 percent of households with disabled or elderly family members are

severely rent burdened. Accordingly, it is essential that the CITYFHEPS expansion be implemented.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for reviewing our testimony and for the opportunity to comment on this bill. In sum, there could be great benefit to increased interagency coordination to address the gaps in services including the ones that we have identified herein.

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For more information, please contact Jeannine Cahill-Jackson at [jcahilljackson@legal-aid.org](mailto:jcahilljackson@legal-aid.org), or at 646-856-0189.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/4/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lorraine Cortez-Vazquez

Address: 2 Lafayette

I represent: NYC Agnc - Commissioner

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/4/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Holt

Address: 5901 Palisade Ave, Bronx, NY

I represent: The Weinberg Center for Elder Justice

Address: 5901 Palisade Ave, Bronx, NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/4/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kevin Kiprovski

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Live on NY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/4/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeannine Cahill-Jackson

Address: 260 E 161<sup>st</sup> St 8<sup>th</sup> Fl Bx NY 10451

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: same as above

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Valerie Reyes-Jimenez

Address: [REDACTED] NYC 10069

I represent: Housing Works

Address: 81 Willoughby St. Bklyn 11201

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Jeanette Estima

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Citymoals

Address: 355 Lexington Ave

*Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms*

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 687 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)  
Name: Kevin Jones

Address: 750 Third Ave New York NY

I represent: AARP NY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms*