



Council of Senior Centers & Services of NYC, Inc.

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PUBLIC HEARING
NYC DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING
2008-2009 ANNUAL PLAN
OCTOBER 29, 2007

The Council of Senior Centers and Services (CSCS) is the central organization representing over 200 member agencies providing services to 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Community-based services include: multi-service senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, case management, home care, transportation and escort services, adult day services, NORCs, counseling, information and referral for benefits, housing, ESL and other supports for immigrants, elder abuse and elderly crime victims assistance, mental health services, emergency preparedness, educational, cultural and health prevention programs, intergenerational programs, and opportunities for volunteerism.

We would like to thank Commissioner Ed Mendez Santiago and staff for the opportunity to testify today.

DFTA's annual report clearly paints the picture of the demographic revolution we are already experiencing and the growth of the aging population which will bring challenges to all stakeholders regarding community-based services to older New Yorkers: government, service providers, advocates, senior citizens, family caregivers and private philanthropy. Mayor Michael Bloomberg's PLANYC 2030, as stated in the DFTA plan, projects a 47% increase in the 60+ population by 2030. The DFTA plan also states that there will be a 20% increase in the 60+ population by 2015. Elderly poverty continues to grow in NYC among women living alone, minorities, and the 75+ population. This will place increased pressure on the Medicaid budget. The state Berger Commission has called for the closing of some nursing home and hospital beds and, in some cases, the entire facility. The public debate increasingly centers around the need to help older New Yorkers to remain in their community along with supports for their family caregivers. As the aging services network has been advocating for a long time, community-based services are cost-efficient and designed to assist the elderly to remain in their

communities. This is the network of services developed over the past 40 years to serve seniors in their neighborhoods, where they live. It has done a remarkable job with tightly constrained budgets.

We have, indeed, arrived at the aging boom after many discussions over the years of preparing for the coming demographic changes. There is a demographic imperative to strengthen and expand community-based services. The structure of services and funding levels are critical components to ensuring that NYC will be a good place to grow old in. On this we all agree. Among the questions we are all asking are: how do we build capacity and agency infrastructure to provide services to meet the growing demand; what funding is needed to ensure services are available to a diverse population of seniors and their family caregivers throughout the neighborhoods of the city; what is the definition of community-based; how do we attract a trained workforce to work in community-based senior service agencies; how do we increase the visibility and value of the aging services network in long term care including the role of senior centers; and other questions that will continue to emerge.

While the questions may be the same, often the views of how to meet these challenges differ based on where you sit. As we continue to work together to discuss the future of aging services, constructive recommendations from community stakeholders needs to be included more in the re-structuring of services. Finding common ground in implementation of services is critical and will maximize benefits to seniors, caregivers and communities as a whole.

Seniors who turn to the community-based aging services network often find themselves on waiting lists: meals-on-wheels, EISEP case management and home care, transportation, and Section 202 housing for low income seniors.

- **Waiting lists for transportation** - As the DFTA plan states, “The need for transportation for frail elderly persons continues to exceed what can be provided by the service network. Many older adult transportation programs have extensive waiting lists.” We also agree with DFTA that increased funding is needed for the purchase of vans as the majority of vans are over five years old.
- **Waiting lists for affordable housing** - The plan also states that there are 217,000 older New Yorkers on waiting lists for 202 housing, a ratio of 12 to 1.
- **Waiting lists for case management and home care** - Some case management agencies have waiting lists for the initial assessments. While caseloads have decreased to an average of 65 in recent years due to an infusion of state funds, without increased funding the caseloads will grow again. Additionally, caseload size needs to be decreased to about 40-50. Also, there are some seniors waiting for home care under the EISEP program.
- **Waiting lists for meals-on-wheels** - As Citymeals is no longer funding weekday waiting lists, there are some MOW providers seeing a growth in waiting lists. After receiving its first COLA in six years in 2005, there has been no increase since.

The community-based aging services network is a service system in fiscal crisis – and the impact is most keenly felt by seniors and caregivers. While it is laudable that all levels of government are discussing the need to assist older adults in remaining in their community, we are concerned that without a significant investment in this system, older New Yorkers will find themselves on waiting lists for services.

BUDGETARY AND LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS: STRENGTHENING THE AGING SERVICES NETWORK CAPACITY TO PROVIDE COMMUNITY-BASED LONG TERM CARE

Mayor Bloomberg's 2030 plan specifically recommends that more senior centers and supportive housing be provided for older New Yorkers to meet the exponential growth coming. Towards this end, we recommend the following:

BASELINE THE BASICS - \$11.6 million in infrastructure funds - \$4.5 million for senior meals, \$4 million for the operational cost of vans, \$3.1 million for rent and space costs (includes equipment). This funding will help stabilize funding for senior centers allowing them to provide meals and services to elderly participants without having to take funds from other parts of the budget. The lack of infrastructure funding has led to the erosion of staff and services over the years. Additionally, funding for the food for senior meals should be indexed to inflation so that there are annual increases ensuring that senior centers can provide nutritional meals. This includes fresh fruit and vegetables as well as a diverse menu.

COLA INCREASE FOR SENIOR SERVICES WORKFORCE – After six years of no salary increases, 1999-2005, the community-based senior services workforce received no COLA increases. Base salaries remain low and lack of annual COLA increases widens the gap in salary between aging services, other human service areas and government. While we appreciate the administration initiated the COLA, it has been two years since that increase. We would like to work with the administration to implement a COLA this year covering the past two years and moving forward. Aging services employees provide a critical service to all of NYC as they are on the frontlines every day providing valuable and life sustaining services to older New Yorkers and their families.

CAPITAL/RENOVATION NEEDS OF SENIOR CENTERS AND SENIOR SERVICES - The current policy of a minimum of \$500,000 a project for capital funds to be used in non-city owned property is severely hurting senior centers, many of which are in need of renovations. Additionally, we are concerned that the city is moving towards not allowing capital dollars in faith based facilities such as churches and synagogues. Many senior centers have been located in these sites for decades. With today's real estate market, there is certainly few, if any, other options for affordable space. We recommend a program for small capital grants be created. It also takes an inordinately long time for capital funds for the purchase of vans to be released leaving agencies in the position of having to use old vans or curtailing services. We appreciate that DFTA has, at times, been frustrated with the slow release of van funds. We would like to work with DFTA to address these issues.

HIV OLDER ADULTS INITIATIVE – CSCS is excited about the \$1 million allocated by City Council for this HIV initiative under the leadership of Speaker Christine Quinn, and Aging Chair,

Councilwoman Maria del Carmen Arroyo. This provides us with the opportunity to work with ACRIA, GMHC, SAGE, borough-wide IACs and other community-based services to initiate the largest educational training program regarding HIV and older adults in the nation. It is time for aging service providers and HIV/AIDS providers to work together and this initiative allows us to do this. We appreciate DFTA's attention on this issue through its conference and outreach to providers and seniors. As we move along in educating staff and seniors we will seek continued support from the administration and City Council.

CSCS HUNGER STUDY - CSCS will soon be releasing its study of hunger among the elderly in NYC. There were 802 seniors interviewed throughout the five boroughs on hunger and "food insecurity". Of those interviewed, one-third, reported food insecurity. As discussions of healthy aging continue, a focus on accessible, nutritional food to all seniors must remain a priority. The annual inflation rate for food hovers around 3%. Indexing automatic inflationary increases in funding would allow meal providers to prepare nutritious meals with adequate fresh fruit and vegetables and variety of food to meet the preferences of a diverse population.

Among the recommendations based on this study are:

Meals-on-Wheels Enhanced Initiative – No homebound senior should have to be on a waiting list for meals-on-wheels. If a senior is assessed as eligible for MOW, the city and state should provide the funding. This includes funding for the food and meal preparation as well as service delivery. For example, if an agency needs another van, driver and deliverer to expand the number of meals, funding should be made available for this.

Congregate meals served at alternative sites – There is agreement that allowing senior centers to provide congregate meals at alternative sites, "senior center without walls", would increase the availability of nutritional meals to seniors and maximize utilization rates. While some senior centers are not serving the full number of congregate meals, it does not mean that there isn't a need in the community for these meals. Congregate meals would be individually wrapped as MOW are. We appreciate that DFTA is in discussion with DOH to streamline the requirement of a food handler's license for the offsite organization. As you know, City Councilman James Vacca, chair, Subcommittee on Senior Centers, has also introduced legislation, Intro 615, that would exempt the offsite organizations from needing a food handlers license. We would like to work with DFTA to expedite the allowance of this expansion of the congregate meal program. This is a win-win for seniors and senior centers.

Expand senior center breakfast program – Currently, a limited number of senior centers serve breakfast. Additional funding to both support the existing breakfast programs and expand the number of senior centers serving breakfast would allow senior participants to have two meals a day at the center adding to their nutritional intake daily.

Additional senior services funding:

AGE SCHOLARSHIPS (AGING GRADUATE EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS) – We appreciate the work of Councilwoman Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Aging Committee chair, in establishing the AGE Scholarship program, funded at \$50,000. The intention of this program is

to support and encourage MSW students to enter the field of gerontology and work in community-based senior services. This is a valuable investment in the professional training of the workforce that is either currently employed at community-based agencies or plan to enter the field. CSCS is in the process of developing the scholarship program.

Safe Streets/Elderly Crime Victims Assistance Program – The Safe Streets/Elderly Crime Victims program, established under Mayor David Dinkins in the early 1990's, successfully allowed senior centers and local police precincts to collaborate in serving elderly crime victims. Funded at \$2.2 million at its peak, the Safe Streets program has decreased to only \$547,000. A loss of the number of senior centers participating in the program and a detrimental erosion of services has left a gap in seniors receiving crime victims assistance. As stated in DFTA's plan, "Crime prevention and security education in local communities can help the elderly live safely." In this time of heightened awareness of the need for emergency preparedness the Safe Streets program could play a critical role in strengthening the relationship between senior centers and the police. CSCS recommends that the Safe Streets program be restored to its \$2.2 million peak. Agencies formerly providing these service should receive the funding.

Healthy Aging Initiative – As DFTA and community providers locally and nationally discuss the valuable role senior centers can play in healthy aging, it is essential that the \$1 million in Healthy Aging funds be baselined and expanded citywide. This funding is a good beginning to expanding the capacity of senior centers to provide healthy aging programs including chronic care management.

Geriatric Mental Health– Long overdue, it is increasingly recognized that geriatric mental health has not received the funding and attention required with a growing elderly population. The \$2.7 million of funding needs to be baselined and expanded. Community-based services that aren't licensed mental health agencies should be eligible to receive funds in order to provide these services to seniors in non-traditional settings such as senior centers. This would expand the access to mental health services to older New Yorkers in a comfortable environment.

Case Management services – As the city moves to restructuring case management services, an infusion of additional dollars needs to be made to adequately serve the growing number of elderly. The existing case management program is in a fiscal crisis. Caseloads, averaging 65, remain high. No additional funding will lead to a continuous increase in caseload size. Frail, elderly individuals will languish on waiting lists for an initial assessment. Concern grows that this will delay the turning on of meals-on-wheels. Case manager salaries are low making it difficult to recruit and retain a qualified, diverse, bilingual staff. Case management is a difficult and demanding job. In order to better serve the most vulnerable part of the city's elderly population, an adequately funded service system and agency infrastructure is crucial. While we appreciate that the city contributes more to the EISEP case management program than the state does, additional funding is still warranted. Otherwise, frail elderly individuals will fall through the cracks leaving them unserved and isolated – and costing the city in health care and other services. Additionally, this will add pressure on already strained caregivers.

Adult Day Services – Funded at only \$3 million, social model adult day service programs (ADS) have been struggling to keep their doors open and serve the need for these services in

communities citywide. ADS is more cost-efficient than the medical model adult day care. These programs often serve seniors who are not Medicaid eligible. They have to privately pay for ADS which can be expensive. ADS plays a key role in the continuum of community-based long term care services providing supportive services to people with Alzheimer's or dementia and their family caregivers. A city investment in ADS is needed to expand this critical service.

Affordable housing crisis for seniors: Assisting seniors in remaining in their homes is the most cost-efficient way to provide community-based long term care services. The #1 concern on the minds of seniors throughout NYC is affordable, safe housing. At one end of the spectrum 217,000 low income seniors are on waiting lists for Section 202 housing. Protections for seniors in Mitchell-Lama and rent regulated apartments is critical. NORCs bring services to where seniors live. Affordable assisted living does not exist in NYC with the average rate around \$3000-\$4000/month.

A multi-year plan to tackle the affordable housing crisis for seniors needs to be developed which could include: CSCS recommends the establishment of a task force to develop a plan to address the affordable housing needs of older New Yorkers.

Expanding Section 202 housing – As stated previously, the DFTA plan reports that 217,000 older New Yorkers are on waiting lists for Section 202 housing. Working with HPD, the leveraging of Section 202 funds with tax credits and other city and state funding is necessary to begin to address waiting lists. Senior preferences in new housing being built can also play an important role.

NORCs – NORCs have successfully brought services to the buildings where large number of seniors live. Expanding this program would help seniors across the city. Baseline current funding is critical to the stability of the NORC programs. CSCS recommends balancing the NORC program by establishing programs more evenly across boroughs and ethnic groups. Close working relationships between NORCs and senior centers would allow for a continuum of services throughout the community.

Rent regulation and right to counsel in housing court – As stated in the DFTA plan, “79% of rent control tenants and 27% of rent stabilized tenants are 55 or older. Within 5-7 years, close to half of the current rent stabilized population will be 55 and over.” While the SCRIE program is helpful, it is significantly underutilized. Decisions for future rent increases must be mindful of the impact on older New Yorkers living on a fixed income. According to Adult Protective Services, 40% of the accepted cases involve seniors facing eviction. Establishing the right to counsel for seniors in housing court would go a long way to assisting seniors to remain in their homes feeling safe. DFTA's pilot program assisting seniors facing eviction is a laudable start to an enormous problem. Establishing the right to counsel is a natural next step to the pilot program. We appreciate DFTA's support in this area.

Supportive housing for the elderly – Under the leadership of Councilmembers Maria del Carmen Arroyo and Erik Martin Dilan, Aging and Housing Committee respectively, a hearing was held last year on the inclusion of frail elderly in the definition of supportive housing. CSCS

supports this as it would open up another opportunity to provide services to seniors in their neighborhood. Additionally, there is currently no affordable assisted living in NYC.

CSCS MARKETPLACE – The CSCS Marketplace is a group purchase program designed to increase the purchasing power of the aging services network. Utilizing the Marketplace brings agencies discounted prices for food, supplies, services and van insurance. Anything available to nursing homes and hospitals is now available to users of the Marketplace group purchasing program. CSCS is excited about the Marketplace initiative as it is using technology to assist agencies in being more efficient in their spending. Cost savings are invested back in the meals and services.

RESTRUCTURING AGING SERVICES: While all can agree that aging services needs to grow in its capacity to meet the increasing demand of older New Yorkers for services, there has been an ongoing dialogue about how these efforts should be implemented. While community agencies and advocates appreciate the opportunities made available by the DFTA for input into the planning of how to restructure services, it is equally important that constructive recommendations be incorporated into the rfp's, implementation and funding of services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you to ensure that older New Yorkers age in place in their communities with dignity.