



**Council of Senior Centers & Services of NYC, Inc.**

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## **Council for Senior Centers and Services NYC Announce 14,000 Dear Mayor Letters Collected as a Results of their Protect our Senior Centers Campaign**

*Speaker Quinn and Council Members Join CSCS to Continue Fight Against  
Neighborhood Senior Center Closings*

(December 4, 2008)—The Center for Senior Centers and Services NYC announced today the collection of 14,000 dear Mayor Bloomberg, protect our senior center letters from seniors throughout the City. The letters, all signed in the last three weeks, are in response to the City's senior center modernization plan that could result in the closing of up to 85 neighborhood senior centers. The letters call on the administration to reconsider their proposal, which could negatively affect local centers and put many seniors at risk of losing vital services. CSCS was joined by Speaker Christine C. Quinn, City Council Aging Committee Chair Maria del Carmen Arroyo, City Council Senior Center Subcommittee Chair James Vacca, and other Council Members.

In November 2008, DFTA issued a modernization plan that calls for the creation of 15-30 comprehensive wellness centers in an effort to regionalize senior center services throughout the City. As a result of this plan, all current senior centers and these new larger centers will be required to apply for funding through an RFP process. The current financial crisis calls into question the City's ability to fund new larger centers, while maintaining all the neighborhood senior centers that provide vital core services. This new plan will force current neighborhood senior centers to close, result in a loss of core services at remaining senior centers, leave centers with unbalanced funding and programming, and give senior centers unclear information on how to address transportation issues or social work services among a number of other issues that will threaten the services seniors rely on.

“CSCS is proud to stand with Speaker Christine Quinn and City Council to oppose the city's senior center rfp. We will deliver thousands of letters signed by seniors to Mayor Bloomberg urging him not to close any senior centers and reduce meals and services,” **said Bobbie Sackman, Director of Public Policy, Council for Senior Centers and Services NYC.** “Funding for meals will be reduced to pay for other requirements in the new plan. The city needs to pay attention that senior centers are reporting an increase in the number of seniors coming for meals. Seniors are growing poorer due to the bad

economy and rising food costs. Budget cuts impact the centers. Senior centers are a major nutrition program for the elderly, addressing hunger among older New Yorkers. We are pleased that the city's NYC Feedback Citywide Customer Survey, released yesterday, reported a 92% customer satisfaction rate with senior centers. The senior center rfp should be withdrawn immediately.”

“CSCS’s incredible campaign has rallied thousands in the call to protect senior centers. The administration has heard loud and clear: they must reconsider plans that place up to 85 centers on the chopping block,” **said Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. “While there is certainly a need to modernize senior services, DFTA’s plan to move forward with these plans during such difficult economic times is deeply concerning. Seniors are depending on the vital services their centers provide more than ever. However, this plan will result in the devastating effect of *reducing* these critical services. CSCS’s letters – gathered by thousands of seniors throughout the city – show just how much seniors value their neighborhood centers and together we will stand up and fight for them.”

The Administration’s modernization plan will require that all current and potential senior centers apply for funding through a new Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Currently there is \$117 million in baseline funding for senior centers, up from \$94 million last year. However, the majority of that figure does not represent new funding, but rather money that has been taken from Council initiative funding and Borough President’s funding and moved to the RFP. As a result, the funding shows that there will not be enough money per region to retain the current number of senior centers.

Funding levels are complicated even further by the financial challenges facing NYCHA, whose facilities house over 40 senior centers. Additionally, the administration’s own RFP implies that up to 85 local community senior centers may close down as a result of this process.

“We have received thousands of letters/petitions from New York City seniors. These communications send a very strong message to the Mayor that they will not take this lying down,” **said Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo**. “Senior centers provide a lifeline for them and during these uncertain financial times, it is imperative that we keep these lifelines open, not take them away in order to make room for new state of the art centers. We will continue to fight this until each and every senior center is still standing and that seniors can be confident that they can still rely on the essential services they have come to depend on.”

“As you can see from the thousands of petitions submitted today, the city’s modernization plan has struck fear into thousands of elderly New Yorkers at exactly the same time when they are struggling with an increased cost of living and broader budget cuts,” **said Council Member James Vacca**. “This is simply the wrong plan at the wrong time with the wrong funding stream, and when we ask why the city cannot accomplish the same goals without upending our existing network of centers, no one has an answer. Together, we are gathered here with one message: Leave our senior centers alone.”

New York City expects to see a 45% increase in the 65 and over population by 2030, representing one-fifth of the City's overall population and outnumbering school-aged children. Seniors depend on the 310 existing neighborhood based centers for meals, social activities, information referral services, and as an opportunity to participate in their communities.

"I applaud the Council for holding hearings and speaking out on what I believe are dangerous budget cuts to senior services in New York City, **said Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer**. DFTA's focus on balancing their budget on the backs of the people who built this great City is irresponsible and shortsighted. I understand that change is necessary in order to prepare for the coming longevity revolution, but the hasty nature of these changes and the lack of consideration given to the opinions and needs of the providers on the ground is unacceptable."

"Seniors in my community need support in these difficult economic times, not the closure of their second homes! As you can see from the volume of letters seniors have sent us, they are not giving in to these proposed changes easily," said **Council Member Diana Reyna**. "There are thousands of voters behind this opposition to DFTA's restructuring, ready to fight for their needs. Change may be necessary, but we need to build on what our senior centers currently provide through better collaboration and partnerships, *not* by eliminating centers."

"Closing senior citizen centers and cutting services couldn't come at a worse time in our City's recent history," **said Council Member James Gennaro**. "Many older New Yorkers have already lived through the lean times of the Great Depression--we can't let them suffer again because of an ill-conceived plan put together by bean-counters."

#### *About CSCS:*

*CSCS's mission is to promote the quality of life, independent living, productivity, and dignity of mature and older adults and their families principally in New York City. CSCS strives to be strategically prepared to effectively address the challenges and opportunities facing seniors and their families, and the nonprofit organizations that serve them by identifying unmet and emerging needs; developing and promoting program and systems innovation; strengthening and expanding the organizational, program and resource capacity of nonprofit providers; and advocating to all sectors at the City, State and national levels.*

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