



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

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BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer  
Testimony before the New York City Council  
Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on Senior Centers**

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Good afternoon. Thank you Chairperson Arroyo, Chairperson Vacca, and members of the Committees on Aging and Senior Centers, for the opportunity to testify today on the impact of the Department for the Aging's modernization plan on the City's senior centers and in favor of Intro 821-A.

By 2030, 20 percent of our city's residents will be over the age of 60. It is therefore critical that we strengthen our infrastructure and programs to ensure seniors are well supported as they age. I am concerned that the Administration is not working in good faith to take us in that direction. I have been to hearings, press conferences and meetings asking the Administration to reconsider the modernization efforts. I hope that today someone will start listening.

There is bad news to contend with. The country is in recession and each of us will need to make sacrifices. There are tough choices to be made, but has DFTA given up the responsibility of helping seniors age with health, dignity and safety? How else should we interpret reducing Social Adult Day Care by over \$1 million? And how is reducing funding to Elder Abuse Prevention by \$424,000 in the best interest of vulnerable senior citizens? At the same time, the Administration is trying to take away the funding Borough Presidents give to senior centers and programs in their boroughs. DFTA has not convinced me that the reductions to their budget from FY08 to FY09 will not result in decreased services, in fact, just the opposite. In combination, these cuts will result in the decimation of senior services as we know them.

Make no mistake, modernization is not simply a response to the fiscal crisis, it is an attempt by the Administration to further an agenda. Are we going to retreat back to the David Stockman model of crisis management, turn our backs on the needy and starve government programs? We must be willing to invest in our seniors with the confidence that the economy will rebound. It is irresponsible and shortsighted to focus on balancing the budget on the backs of the people who built this great City.

My overarching concern with the DFTA modernization plan is the number of proposals released in rapid succession seeking to institute changes which the advocate and provider communities have told me they do not support. I understand that change is necessary in order to prepare for the coming “longevity revolution,” but I have concerns about the hasty nature of these changes and the lack of consideration that has been given to the opinions and needs of the providers on the ground.

While DFTA rightfully seeks ways to improve senior center utilization and encourages centers to dream and plan big, it must also recognize and support existing programs that we know to be efficient and reliable. I hope that DFTA will consider the following issues carefully and address these concerns.

- 1. DFTA must convince me that centers will maintain core services at all contracted senior centers with the proposed changes in funding.** Educational, cultural and recreational programs are valuable to all seniors; however, with the current economic downturn and the rapidly aging population, we can assume there will be an increased demand for core services. I urge DFTA to identify baseline requirements for core service commitments that all senior centers must provide, particularly in regards to nutrition.
- 2. DFTA must inform the public which senior centers will close, and ensure adequate geographic coverage amidst the closures.** In practical terms, modernization will result in fewer senior centers that are larger in size and more comprehensive in scope. DFTA has a responsibility to ensure that all seniors have access to a center a reasonable distance from their home. The Council is moving DFTA in the right direction with Intro 821-A which requires that public notification be given when senior centers face cuts, consolidation or closure.
- 3. DFTA must consider transportation services for seniors who will have to travel further distances to reach their nearest center.** Accessibility is one of the most important factors in senior center utilization. If it is too difficult for seniors to reach their centers, they will simply stay home. The travel distance, number of buses or subways that need to be taken, and number of busy roads that must be crossed will all factor into a senior’s decision about using a center. DFTA must understand that no senior center proposal is complete without a comprehensive transportation plan.
- 4. DFTA must maintain culturally appropriate services.** Many centers have developed specialized cultural, nutritional and social programming to cater to the demographics of the communities they serve. This often includes bilingual staff. If centers are consolidated or closed, DFTA must ensure that seniors have access to services that are culturally appropriate to them.
- 5. DFTA must preserve social networks amidst senior center closures.** Many seniors have long standing relationships with staff and other seniors at their local centers. These relationships are strong contributors to the health and well-being of seniors. I urge DFTA to acknowledge the importance of these relationships and develop a plan to preserve the existing social networks that have been created through senior centers.

6. **DFTA must support senior center management and staff in the transition to evidence based practice and new models of service delivery.** It is generally understood that there will be a reduction in the number of senior centers in 2009 – 2010 and a reduction in DFTA’s total annual budget. It is an unfair expectation that senior centers should be able to provide the same level of service with less funding. Further, the proposed shift to evidence-based programming will require additional training and resources for agency staff. DFTA must carefully consider the increased burden that may be placed on staff and ensure that the appropriate training and supports are in place before the contracts take effect. It is time for DFTA to think creatively. Consider collaborating with colleges and universities to place graduate students in senior centers to research, implement and evaluate evidence-based practice.
  
7. **DFTA must ensure that resources continue to go to services.** In my conversations with Administration, DFTA assured me that modernization will result in no service reduction. Then DFTA passed a 3% reduction onto service providers. To claim this is not DFTA reducing services is wholly disingenuous. The ideas proposed in the modernization plan require substantial senior center changes—changes that will likely be costly to implement. I fear senior centers will be pushed to cut back on other services, or will face overall financial insecurity. Many senior centers already fundraise to meet their basic operational needs. To require that they meet their own development needs will shift staff resources away from where it should be—focused on seniors.

My primary recommendation to DFTA is to retract the Senior Center RFP until the concerns raised today can be adequately addressed. The aging network is already reeling from the case management transition and is preparing to absorb more changes as the new home delivered meals contracts are fully implemented. I am deeply concerned that DFTA’s modernization efforts are creating delays in service delivery and will end up hurting seniors rather than helping them.

I’ve seen DFTA make demands on the providers and seniors, and it’s about time DFTA started answering to some of our demands for transparency and accountability. I am here today to ask the Council to stand up and say no to DFTA’s ill-conceived modernization plan. I look forward to working with you and our senior service providers to responsibly prepare New York City’s senior centers for the future.