



New York City Council
Joint Hearing
Committee on Finance and Subcommittee on Capital Budget
Chair Dromm and Chair Gibson
May 21, 2020
Remote Hearing

Thank you to Chair Dromm and the full Finance Committee and Chair Gibson and the Subcommittee on Capital Budget for holding this important hearing amidst these challenging times.

With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations, LiveOn NY's members provide core services that allow older adults to thrive in our communities, including senior centers, home-delivered meals, affordable housing, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, NORCs, case management and more. DFTA's network provides services to over 50,000 older adults and caregivers daily.

Seniors are the most at risk to COVID-19. Their funding for services should not be at risk too.

Just this Tuesday, LiveOn NY held our 25th Annual Aging Advocacy Day. We did so virtually, with more than 200 individuals registering to participate in the event and a shared commitment to calling on the City to make critical investments in senior services, as well as thanking fellow providers for their work throughout COVID-19. Many Council Members engaged via Zoom and social media, as well as fielding calls from constituents; *thank you all for participating in this exciting event.*

While we couldn't be physically on the steps of City Hall, the calls for support somehow felt louder and more clear than ever. Amidst our calls for support, one provider shared a story of receiving a call from a senior whose food supply had run out, a call not unfamiliar during this time; another confided that their organization had lost more than forty clients during this time, not unlike many providers who speak regularly about struggling with the loss of clients and colleagues; and participants having shared messages of how essential their teams have proven. With every point made, the need for increased support from the City became both urgent and undeniable.

To respond to these stories, and the abundantly clear need for robust support of older New Yorkers throughout our City, LiveOn NY and our partners request the following key investments to be made.

\$26.2 million for home-delivered meals for seniors

This program—unique from GetFood in that it serves seniors who were homebound *prior* to COVID-19 and will remain so after—has been chronically underfunded for years. Today, the reimbursement rate for meals is 20% below the national average, even as providers have experienced a 20% increase in demand amidst the pandemic. Together, it's a recipe for leading our City's non-profits to the brink of insolvency. Even worse, providers have yet to receive any additional funding to provide drivers incentive pay as they continue to make door-to-door deliveries in spite of the increased risk. This is unsustainable and

wrong. **The funding requested will compensate for: increased demand; incentive pay for essential workers; adequate support of the weekend meals; and will close the per-meal reimbursement deficit.** Together, the funds will enable the program to meet demand resulting from increased need and awareness of the City’s incredible senior service sector, as well as ensuring providers can continue to provide high-quality, culturally competent meals provided by local, community-based non-profits.

Please also note that the Request for Proposal (RFP) for this contract is currently due June 1st, meaning that providers—who are already inundated with increased demand, as well as concerns for staff and participants—must also grapple with responding to an RFP that would substantially alter the system at-large. **This procurement, and all similar procurements, should be delayed until COVID-19 has subsided and its effects can begin to be understood.**

\$10 million for Senior Centers, which was already promised in 2017

In 2017, the City undertook a “model budget process” for numerous contracts, including senior centers, to bring these in line to reflect true costs, with particular emphasis on right-sizing contracts to allow for more competitive wages of the oft underpaid human services staff. During this time, the senior center portfolio was promised \$10 million to be received by FY21; senior centers even received notices of how much assistance would go directly to their programs. This funding, however, remains excluded from the Executive Budget, despite initial promises in 2017 and further promises during the preliminary budget hearings. This must be rectified by budget adoption. Beyond being wrong to renege on such a promise to seniors and providers, these funds are critical to supporting a predominantly female and minority workforce that—as evidenced throughout COVID-19—can no longer bear the burden of such persistent disparities.

Restore all one-time senior services funds

Funding for services must be permanently maintained to prevent any sort of disruption in critical programs. The \$2.8 million for senior centers, \$2.84 million for home delivered meals, \$1 million for NORCs, and the \$2.1 million for NYCHA community spaces should all be baselined and to sustain these programs moving forward. Further, by only making these investments on an annual basis, rather than baselining the investments as we are requesting, providers are unable to use funds to address salaries or fill budgetary gaps as is most urgently needed.

Additionally, City Council’s \$1 million case management investment should be baselined, as waiting lists for this program continued to grow prior to COVID-19, and have skyrocketed along with an intensification of client needs since the pandemic began.

Continue City Council Discretionary Funding

City Council has long been a staunch supporter of City and district-wide senior services programs through allocations in Schedule C. We thank you, and while recognizing the budget challenges that are upon us, we continue to advocate for full restoration for all Senior Service Programs funded in Schedule C. At the outset, these funds helped to fill gaps existing in the infrastructure of support for seniors, they

therefore remain as critical as ever to supporting older New Yorkers as we embark on our new normal. Examples of key initiatives that support the wellbeing of older adults include: NORCs, Support our Seniors, SuCasa, Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations, Health Aging Initiative, Social Adult Day, and others.

Invest \$1.7 Million to Achieve Pay Parity for NORC Staff

Currently, there are 11,000 older adults spread across dozens of NORCs across New York City. However, the NORC staff that provide these critical support services earn, on average, \$15,000 less than their DFTA-funded senior center counterparts, even if they are performing the same duties. \$1.7 million in new funding is necessary to achieve pay parity across DFTA programs and ensure fairness not only for staff, but for the older adults living in these NORCs.

Continued Investments in Human Services Sector

Years of underfunding the sector have resulted in the entire human services workforce being some of the lowest compensated workers in New York City's economy. A 3% COLA on the personal services line of all human services contracts at the cost of \$48 million is needed in the FY21 budget to ensure this vital workforce does not slip further into poverty. The Mayor and City Council have taken important steps to begin to address this crisis with previous multi-year cost-of-living investments, but there is no COLA in place for future years. The 3% COLA is a needed investment while workers, advocates, providers, and elected officials continue to work together on more comprehensive solutions to ensure that human services workers finally earn fair pay for their labor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of the above needs.

Please contact Katelyn Andrews, Director of Public Policy at LiveOn NY with any questions (Kandrews@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

LiveOn NY

Making New York a better place to age

on important topics to help them age well in their communities.