

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING**  
**Office of Management Analysis and Planning**  
**Summary of Queens Hearing**  
**October 26, 2008**

GENERAL INFORMATION

**Number Attending:** 39

**On Podium:** Edwin Méndez-Santiago, Commissioner  
Jorge Romero, Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Fiscal Management  
Linda Whitaker, Assistant Commissioner, OEM & Community Outreach  
Alan Hom, Deputy Director, Bureau of Long-term Care and Active Aging  
Ramona Messana, Bureau of Management and Budget

**Number Testifying:** 22 speakers, of whom 6 did not submit written testimonies, and 1 submitted written testimony and did not speak.

**SUMMARY OF TOPIC AREAS (Speaker list attached)**

**DFTA SERVICES/SERVICE NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY**

*Senior Centers*

Several senior center advocates appealed to DFTA to keep their centers open. Advocates stated that as the senior population increases and the economy is not steady, more seniors will need the services offered by senior centers. An advocate stated that Queens is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse counties in the nation, and closing one senior center in Queens is equivalent to isolating a community of seniors in need.

A senior center representative asked that DFTA clarify whether funds will be given to centers for renovations and replacement of essential equipment. The representative stated that center renovations are necessary to keep seniors in a safe environment and meet safety standards. Advocates also expressed concern regarding utilization standards and how centers are rated. Advocates stated that although their centers meet the needs of many seniors, they still receive an underutilized rating.

As a part of DFTA's modernization of senior centers, an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender "LGBT" seniors appealed to DFTA to conduct an RFP process that will address and include the special needs of LGBT seniors.

(1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 15, 20, 23, 24)

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*Senior Centers (cont.)*

**Recommendations for DFTA:**

- DFTA refrain from closing senior centers.
- DFTA delay the release of the senior center RFP.
- DFTA budget monies for renovations and repair of senior centers.
- Modernize senior centers to attract newly retired baby boomers, but also meet the needs of disabled/frail seniors who attend centers.

**Transportation**

A senior advocate expressed concern that DFTA's Annual Plan did not include community-centered transportation services. Advocates stated that many NYC communities are not well served by public transportation and are not appropriate for seniors and the disabled population. Advocates stated that our public transportation system lacks decent public bathrooms and are not always accessible to the disabled. Advocates stated that transportation is vital for the most vulnerable seniors, who without transportation will be left without a means to access services and take care of their personal needs.

Several representatives expressed concern that the Queens Borough President's office will no longer have a discretionary fund to support their transportation programs. The advocates stated that clients and caregivers need transport to attend programs and that DFTA's disruption of the continuum of discretionary funding is a disruption to client services. A representative also stated that monies received from the discretionary fund are used to reimburse volunteers for their transportation cost.

Overall, senior advocates appealed to DFTA to restore the Queens Borough President's discretionary fund because programs stated that agencies in Queens need the money to continue providing transportation for seniors. (2, 6, 8, 9, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24)

**Recommendations:**

- DFTA restore the Borough President's Discretionary fund
- DFTA budget vans for all senior centers.
- Help coordinate funding for Para-transit.
- DFTA work with MTA to improve Access-A-Ride service.

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**Case Management**

An advocate expressed great concern regarding the restructuring of case management in Queens. The advocate stated that Queens is the most diverse borough, and it is important to have case managers who can communicate with clients in their own language and dialect. Advocates stated that changes to case management hinder seniors from seeking services because of their inability to communicate, as well as their mistrust of strangers.

An advocate stated that DFTA informed their staff to not take additional cases and to create a waiting list. The advocate stated that seniors who need help are not receiving it and expressed concern that agencies will be held liable should a senior on a waiting list die. Advocates appealed to DFTA for additional case management funds to hire more workers to lower case loads, eliminate waiting lists, and hire workers who can communicate in the client's language.

A representative appealed to DFTA to adequately fund Case Management agencies so that they can continue to meet the needs of the oldest/frail seniors who need in-home services.

(4, 8, 10, 20, 21, 16)

**Recommendations for DFTA:**

- DFTA create a centralized waiting list.
- DFTA give agencies additional money to hire more case managers.
- Modernize senior centers to attract newly retired baby boomers, but also meet the needs of disabled/frail seniors who attend centers.

**Housing**

An advocate stated that immediate action must be taken to provide seniors affordable housing. The advocate further stated that reports show that there is a ten year waiting list for senior housing and that the affordable housing units for seniors are being converted to market rent rates. An agency representative stated that expansion of affordable senior housing can occur if DFTA, the City and State set aside land and provide financing opportunities for non-profits to create partnerships to build senior housing. A Council member stated that studies undertaken by the City Council revealed that some older adults feel trapped in apartments that are inappropriate for their lifestyles, for example, walk-ups, room shares, housing that is too expensive and apartments that are too large.

(9, 21, 24)

**Recommendations:**

- Seniors in Mitchell-Lama apartments should be exempt from having to purchase their apartments.
- DFTA should increase the income eligibility from \$28,000 to \$35,000.
- DFTA should appeal to the Federal government to increase Section 8 Housing.
- DFTA should work with other officials to protect seniors from landlord harassment and coercion to leave their apartments.

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**Home Meal Delivery Program**

Advocates expressed concern with DFTA's newest Home Meal Delivery plans and whether seniors from various ethnic groups will receive meals that meet their religious, ethnic and nutritional needs. Advocates further expressed concern that seniors will not be given a choice and will be forced to take frozen over hot meals. (1, 8, 16, 17, 19 23)

**Recommendations:**

- DFTA create a centralized waiting list to ensure seniors fairness in receiving meals and other services.
- Public and private sector strengthen their partnership to aid the elderly.
- Increase funding for food programs to eliminate waiting lists for delivered meals.
- DFTA request additional Federal monies for food programs.

**Legislation/Policy**

An advocacy group presented findings from a study on poverty and the elderly. Based on the study findings, the advocate stated that these are perilous times for seniors. The advocate appealed to DFTA to reach out to the Federal government for additional funding for more affordable senior housing, accessible transportation, and senior meal programs.

Several advocacy groups from senior centers and caregiver programs requested that DFTA restore the Queens Borough President's discretionary fund that provides monies the programs rely on to operate.

**Recommendations:**

- DFTA advocate that the Federal government increase benefit levels for Social Security, Food Stamps and Section 8 Housing. DFTA should increase the income eligibility from \$28,000 to \$35,000.
- DFTA advocate that the Federal government reduce Medicare deductibles and co-pays in parts A, B and D.
- DFTA comply with the NYC City Charter and not take away discretionary funding from Borough Presidents.

(1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 17, 18)

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**SPEAKERS**

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|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Adele Bender</b>        | <b>JPAC</b>   |
| <b>2. Amy Winarsy</b>         | <b>Met Council on Jewish Poverty</b>                            |
| <b>3. Antoinette Emers</b>    | <b>Visions*</b>   |
| <b>4. Chris Lennon</b>        | <b>SAGE</b>   |
| <b>5. Cynthia Zalisky</b>     | <b>Queens Jewish Community Council</b>                          |
| <b>6. Deborah Barnes</b>      | <b>Florence E. Smith Senior Center *</b>                        |
| <b>7. Frederick Solazzi</b>   | <b>Community Service Society Retired &amp; Senior Vol. Pgm.</b> |
| <b>8. Helen Marshall</b>      | <b>Queens Borough President</b>                                 |
| <b>9. Helen Sears</b>         | <b>NYC Council Member</b>                                       |
| <b>10. Jan Fenster</b>        | <b>Queens Jewish Community Council*</b>                         |
| <b>11. James Collins</b>      | <b>New York Citizens' Committee on Aging</b>                    |
| <b>12. John Todras</b>        | <b>Kew Gardens Senior Center *</b>                              |
| <b>13. Kwang Kim</b>          | <b>Korean Senior Center</b>                                     |
| <b>14. Laura Stamm</b>        | <b>The Family Center</b>  |
| <b>15. Lauren Grey Outlaw</b> | <b>Allen Senior Center*</b>                                     |

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**SPEAKERS cont.**

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| <b>16. Linda Leest, Ph. D</b> | <b>Services Now for Adult Persons (SNAP)</b>             |
| <b>17. Lydia Musheyev</b>     | <b>Queens Jewish Community Council*</b>                  |
| <b>18. Marcella Dotan</b>     | <b>The Family Center</b>                                 |
| <b>19. Marta Wolf</b>         | <b>Parker Jewish Institute</b>                           |
| <b>20. Patricia Dolan</b>     | <b>Forest Hills Community House</b>                      |
| <b>21. Sam Goldstein</b>      | <b>Selfhelp</b>  |
| <b>22. Shakira Smalls</b>     | <b>Representative for Council Member James Sanders *</b> |
| <b>23. Robert Friedman</b>    | <b>YM-YWCA</b>   |

\* Speakers who did not submit testimony.

**Submitted Testimony Only**

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|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>24. Bruce Cunningham</b> | <b>Queens Interagency Council on Aging (QICA)</b> |
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