

STATEN ISLAND PUBLIC HEARING
ANNUAL PLAN SUMMARY 2009-2010
DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING

460 Brielle Avenue
Staten Island, New York
October 28, 2008
10:15 A.M.

PANEL:

COMMISSIONER EDWIN MÉNDEZ-SANTIAGO, NYC Department For The Aging

Karen Shaffer, DFTA Assistant Commissioner

Leonora Vaccaro, DFTA Council Member

Linda Whitaker, DFTA Assistant Commissioner

Karen Taylor, DFTA Bureau of Senior Centers

Bertha Mandel, DFTA Advisory Council Member

Carol Dunn, DFTA Advisory Council Member

2 MS. SHAFFER: My name is Karen
3 Shaffer, and I am assistant
4 commissioner for the Department for the
5 Aging. Here comes the commissioner.
6 Good morning, all. This is one of a
7 series of annual public hearings
8 conducted in each of the city's five
9 boroughs. The purpose of these annual
10 hearings is to provide an overview of
11 the Department's activities and to
12 provide the public with the opportunity
13 to share their experience and
14 recommendations through oral and
15 written testimony. Public testimony
16 will be transcribed and forwarded to
17 the leadership for review and for
18 consideration.

19 And now, it is my pleasure to
20 introduce to you our commissioner,
21 Commissioner Edwin Méndez-Santiago.

22 THE COMMISSIONER: Good morning.
23 It really is a pleasure to see so many
24 of you, but I apologize that we don't
25 have enough chairs. We are trying to

2 get some additional chairs, and
3 hopefully before we end, we can have
4 you sit comfortably.
5 Let me welcome you to this, our
6 public hearing in Staten Island for the
7 annual plan for the years 2010 to 2011.
8 Let me just take a moment to introduce
9 -- from our staff, you have met Karen
10 Shaffer, assistant commissioner, Linda
11 Whitaker, Karen Taylor. And I'm very
12 pleased that we're joined by two of
13 our -- three of our advisory board
14 members who I would like to just
15 recognize because they really do
16 represent you well, Carol Dunn,
17 Ms. Bertha Mandel, someone who I know
18 you know, Leonora Vaccaro.
19 I want to remind you that we try
20 to be as transparent and have all of
21 our information available as possible,
22 and today we are getting a transcript
23 of this hearing. But anyone who has
24 written testimony, with your
25 permission, we will also post your

2 testimony on our web site. Just simply
3 file those little cards so that we can
4 do that.
5 The Department is really looking
6 forward to hearing your views on
7 questions like how can the Department
8 for the Aging best support senior
9 centers as health and wellness centers,
10 as models of cultural and linguistic
11 competency and keep service providers
12 in an age-friendly community.
13 Before we turn this forum over to
14 you, I would like to just highlight a
15 few achievements that we do share in
16 our annual plan. Let me start with
17 DFTA's modernization and hopefully
18 clear a lot of the misconceptions that
19 are out there in the community. I know
20 there's some anxiety about this. For
21 more than two years, the Department has
22 been in discussions with the community,
23 with the providers at the Department,
24 with our advisory council, with
25 advocates and others to really talk

2 about the changes that we all agree are
3 needed in services to older people
4 because of the increase in demand. As
5 you know, the population of older New
6 Yorkers continues to increase, and we
7 also know that the population is
8 changing and is becoming very diverse
9 across all spectrums, young older
10 people who are just retiring in their
11 60s or early 60s to very old New
12 Yorkers in their 80s and above. In
13 fact, the fastest growing demographic
14 in the City of New York are people
15 above the age of 80, so we need to have
16 senior centers and programs that can
17 resonate or be relevant to as many
18 older adults as possible.
19 To help in that discussion, the
20 Department has had meetings with over
21 180 organizations. We have held public
22 hearings such as this. We have
23 developed working groups that have
24 discussed how to change our programs or
25 how to modernize. We have issued

2 concept papers and received input into
3 those concept papers.
4 Let me share with you quickly
5 where we are today in our process for
6 modernization. We began with case
7 management, and I am pleased to share
8 with you that the case management
9 modernization is fully underway. The
10 Department invested -- in these
11 difficult times, it's important to
12 highlight that again -- the Department
13 added an additional \$5.6 million into
14 our case management system which is an
15 unprecedented 36 percent increase from
16 16.7 million to 22.7 million. We are
17 confident that our case management
18 programs will continue to provide
19 services in a holistic manner to over
20 22,000 older adults across the city.
21 Home-delivered meals, that
22 request for proposal was issued, and
23 we're very close, in the next few days,
24 to be able after negotiations to
25 announce the winners of those

2 proposals. I think you'll be very
3 pleased with the announcement here in
4 Staten Island. Again, why change
5 home-delivered meals? Again, the
6 numbers are growing, and one of the
7 issues we wanted to maximize across the
8 city was to offer older adults who
9 deserve that respect the ability as
10 consumers to have choices so that you
11 can get meals that meet your needs,
12 whether those are kosher meals, whether
13 those are hot meals, frozen meals or,
14 particularly for the growing number of
15 older adults who have diabetes, meals
16 that meet their health care need.
17 Now turning to an issue that I
18 think has many of you here today is our
19 request for proposal for senior
20 centers. That will be issued in the
21 next week or two. Here too, I want to
22 reassure you that our intent is not to
23 close senior centers. It's to enhance
24 senior centers and make every center as
25 strong as they possibly can be with a

2 focus on health and wellness. We want
3 every senior center to be at the level
4 that they can provide services that
5 look at your physical, mental and
6 spiritual well-being with arts
7 programs, dance programs, visual arts,
8 just to name a few. We have some
9 across the city that are already doing
10 that, some right here in Staten Island.
11 But unfortunately, across the entire
12 city, when we look at over 300 senior
13 centers, not all are doing the things
14 that they really should be doing on
15 your behalf.
16 Now let me just take a moment to
17 share with you Mayor Bloomberg's vision
18 for our city which is an initiative
19 that he announced last year that we
20 refer to as the City For All Ages.
21 DFTA's modernization is a part of that
22 vision that really wants to look at how
23 do we get our entire city to be a city
24 that's friendly to older adults and
25 promotes positive living for people

2 throughout the entire city. And in
3 that respect, we've asked every city
4 agency to share with us how they are
5 looking at the older consumers that
6 they represent.

7 And I want to share just a few
8 examples of projects that we have
9 ongoing with some other city agencies
10 that, again, look at making services as
11 accessible and as meaningful to older
12 adults across the city.

13 Health and Hospitals Corporation,
14 we're here at Sea View, one of HHC's
15 facilities, has been very involved
16 working with DFTA as a partner in
17 programs that combine the medical
18 health that's available at an HHC
19 facility with the wonderful kind of
20 social health that's available at our
21 senior centers to address, for example,
22 diabetes. So you see the doctor, the
23 doctor gives you numbers -- sometimes
24 we don't understand what those numbers
25 mean -- gives you medication, gives you

2 instructions and again you go home and
3 you say, I'm not sure what the doctor
4 meant. By partnering with our senior
5 centers, the centers can then help
6 older adults understand what the
7 physician meant, make those changes,
8 make sure you're taking your meds the
9 way the doctor wanted you to,
10 increasing your activity, for example,
11 in diabetes. So that in working
12 together, we ensure that we're going to
13 help you retain as much wellness as
14 possible.

15 We have a similar program with
16 the City's Department of Health and
17 Mental Hygiene and the Mental
18 Association of New York City to help
19 diagnose seniors who may suffer from
20 depression as early as possible.

21 Depression can be treated.

22 There was a myth some years ago
23 that doctors believed that if you were
24 older and you had depression, there was
25 really no treatment for you. We know

2 now that that's not true. Depression
3 is very treatable, but you have to
4 catch it early. So this is again
5 another partnership that helps us move
6 forward on creating the kind of
7 partnerships that strengthen our senior
8 centers and provide you with much
9 better centers at a local level.
10 Now, let me just talk about our
11 walking club because we just celebrated
12 our last senior stroll here in Staten
13 Island when over 2,300 seniors from
14 across the city joined us here in
15 Staten Island to celebrate again an
16 image of active aging, that older
17 adults when given the choice will say,
18 Yes, I want to join a walking club, or,
19 I want the kind of activities that a
20 good senior center is offering. Again,
21 we bring that as an example of the kind
22 of services that we want to see in our
23 request for proposal.
24 I won't read the rest of my
25 presentation because I'm concerned of

2 those of you who are still standing,
3 except to say that I list there some of
4 the many award-winning programs that we
5 do have at the Department, and I urge
6 you -- you can see this at our internet
7 site so that you can read it
8 comfortably, but I want to make sure
9 before I do close that I do share this
10 information. We all know we're facing
11 some very difficult financial times.
12 We've read in The Times, and it's
13 disheartening to note that still today
14 some older people have to make choices
15 between taking their meds or paying
16 their rent.
17 And the Department wants to
18 ensure that all of our seniors across
19 the City of New York know about the
20 many programs that we offer that can
21 help you when times are tough, when
22 it's hard to really make ends meet.
23 One is the senior citizen rent increase
24 exemption program. I won't describe it
25 at length here. But if your centers

2 want information on this, we can send
3 out speakers to talk about this. This
4 is a program that lets you stay in your
5 current rent stabilized apartment, and
6 you don't have to pay the increase in
7 rent if you're eligible. The
8 eligibility income level for this is
9 \$28,000, but a lot of seniors still
10 don't know about this or are sometimes
11 embarrassed to apply. This is a great
12 program. The landlord doesn't lose
13 because the landlord gets a break in
14 his or her taxes, so no one is losing
15 here.

16 We want to spread the word about
17 programs like this or programs like
18 HEAP that help with paying your energy
19 costs, now that we're almost in the
20 winter and energy bills are expected to
21 be very high. So again, there are many
22 programs that we offer to assist older
23 adults, particularly in these difficult
24 times.

25 And the last one I will mention

2 before we listen to you, it's an
3 important one because beginning
4 today -- in November, from
5 November 15th and it ends on
6 December 31st. How many of you here
7 have Medicare Part D? A few of you.
8 Well, this is the one time in the year
9 where Medicare allows you to switch
10 your plan. So to provide you with
11 information, we have a very active
12 program that helps provide information
13 about Medicare, Medicare Part D with
14 sites here in Staten Island so that you
15 can sit and review whether you want to
16 keep the plan you currently have or you
17 think you need to change your plan.
18 It's an important plan to make sure
19 that you're getting the best possible
20 support, again, so you're not forced to
21 make those difficult choices.
22 Again, it's my pleasure to be
23 here, and I look forward to hearing
24 your testimony today.
25 MS. SHAFFER: Before we move on,

2 we have a few more chairs we would like

3 to bring out, so if we can bring them

4 out, Joe, so people can sit down.

5 THE COMMISSIONER: We do have

6 more chairs, but it's really raining

7 hard. We're just going to have to dry

8 them so you don't sit on a wet chair.

9 But as soon as they're dry, we will be

10 putting in more chairs. Again, our

11 apologies.

12 Why don't we start so we don't

13 have you standing that long. We will

14 try to move through our program

15 quickly.

16 MS. SHAFFER: Okay. The

17 panelists consisting of the

18 Department's executive staff are here

19 to listen to your testimony. This is

20 not a question-and-answer forum. I

21 would like to remind today's speakers

22 that to provide all individuals with an

23 equal opportunity to speak, each

24 registered speaker is allotted five

25 minutes to present their oral

2 testimony. The electric timer which is
3 to my right will turn red signaling
4 that you're speaking time has expired.
5 If anyone would like to testify and has
6 not registered, the on-site
7 registration will close very soon.
8 It's supposed to close at 10:30, but we
9 did start a little later, so we will
10 allow for about 15 minutes later.
11 Also, please leave a copy of your
12 testimony on our front table. If you
13 don't have a copy to leave today, then
14 DFTA has provided self-addressed
15 envelopes in the back, and we suggest
16 you take one and mail it to us.
17 And our first speaker today is
18 Lee Covino from the Staten Island
19 Borough President's Office. Lee.
20 MR. COVINO: Good morning. My
21 name is Lee Covino, and I'm the
22 director of contracts and procurements
23 for Staten Island Borough President Jim
24 Molinaro. In the interest of
25 disclosure, I thought I would also

2 mention that I have previously worked
3 for the Department for the Aging from
4 1985 to 1990 as program officer for the
5 Bronx, Manhattan and citywide units.
6 Following is the borough
7 president's statement for today's
8 hearing:
9 Commission Méndez-Santiago,
10 Distinguished Members of the New York
11 City Department for the Aging,
12 community advocates, service providers
13 and Staten Island seniors: Recently I
14 reviewed DFTA's annual plan summary for
15 2009-2010. In the document were many
16 references to the health and long-term
17 care needs of our aging population, the
18 needs of family members and other
19 caregivers who help our older adults
20 remain independent in the community and
21 other service needs such as
22 transportation, in-home meals, home
23 care, et cetera.
24 But nowhere in the report was
25 reference made of DFTA's abrupt

2 defunding of five Staten Island borough
3 president senior programs and the
4 immediate impact upon our senior
5 population, nor any reference made to
6 the commissioner's intent to defund the
7 remaining programs, 11 Staten Island
8 borough president programs effective
9 June 30th, 2009. These changes were
10 made known to me only recently in a
11 letter received by my office on
12 September 25, 2008, after the first
13 quarter of the fiscal year was almost
14 completed.

15 Among the five programs which are
16 prohibited from receiving borough
17 president funds this year are Sea View
18 Adult Day Care program, \$46,317, a
19 long-term funded and important service
20 for both Staten Island seniors and
21 caregivers discontinued effective
22 July 1.

23 As we all know by now, the City's
24 Health and Hospital System has
25 historically underserved the residents

2 of this borough, and these funds help
3 to supplement the meager services
4 currently received for more than ten
5 years. No efforts to transition these
6 services have been made by DFTA to
7 date.

8 Staten Island Interagency Council

9 For the Aging, \$46,317, another
10 long-term advocacy program, also
11 abruptly cancelled effective July 1.

12 It should be noted that when BP funding
13 was allocated well over a decade ago,
14 DFTA advocated establishing IACs in
15 each of the five boroughs but now has
16 defunded all of them via
17 discontinuation of borough presidents'
18 funding.

19 Richmond Senior Services/Project
20 Share, \$14,981, a minor repair program
21 helping seniors maintain their homes in
22 the community. This program has also
23 operated on Staten Island for well over
24 a decade, but it too was abruptly
25 cancelled effective July 1st.

2 The Alzheimer's Foundation of
3 Staten Island, \$4,020, a respite
4 program for Alzheimer's victims giving
5 a much-needed break for day-to-day
6 caregivers, also abruptly cancelled
7 July 1st.
8 Central Family Life Center Senior
9 Recreation Program in Stapleton,
10 \$4,782, only started last year and
11 cancelled July 1st.
12 Again, neither my office nor any
13 of these programs were advised of these
14 changes prior to the beginning of the
15 fiscal year, July 1st. As a result,
16 none of the programs were available to
17 plan for the orderly transition of
18 services for their respective
19 frail/elderly service recipients.
20 Now, the 11 remaining DFTA
21 programs who will no receive BP funding
22 effective June 30, 2009 are Community
23 Agency for Senior Citizens, New Lane
24 Center, \$91,496; CASC Frail/Elderly
25 Transportation Program, \$39,462; CASC

2 Forever Young, Cassidy-Coles and South
3 Beath Senior Centers and the Carol
4 Molinaro Dialysis Center, 1,500 to each
5 center and 5,500 to dialysis; CASC
6 Senior Transportation Program,
7 \$325,597; CSS-RSVP Serve Volunteer
8 Program \$16,674; CYO Senior Guild
9 Luncheon Program, \$11,116; JCC Kosher
10 Nutrition Program, \$88,652; Richmond
11 Home Needs Homecare Program, \$74,108;
12 and Staten Island Meals on Wheels
13 Program, \$60,212; Staten Island
14 Community Services Friendship Clubs,
15 New Dorp Saturday Senior Program,
16 \$18,753; and Richmond University
17 Hospital Stapleton, West Brighton and
18 Mariner's Harbor Senior Centers, \$2,000
19 to each center.
20 Again, there is no reference to
21 the impact of the loss of these
22 services in the annual plan.
23 It should be noted here that
24 borough president discretionary funds
25 in different amounts for all five

2 boroughs were negotiated by the five
3 BPs during the board of estimate era.
4 For Staten Island, this was done in
5 consultation with the senior services
6 advocates who developed a series of
7 service enhancements for home care,
8 congregate meals, home-delivered meals,
9 transportation and a host of other
10 services where the borough was short on
11 funding. Some of these service
12 enhancements have transferred by the
13 borough president to different
14 providers over the years when RFPs were
15 awarded by DFTA.
16 To date, DFTA has made no
17 indication whether these enhanced
18 services will continue at current
19 levels under the new senior services
20 plan nor whether these important
21 funding dollars will remain within the
22 borough. The annual plan as presented
23 is devoid of any of these implications,
24 both for Staten Island and programs
25 citywide.

2 At this time, the five borough
3 presidents have requested a joint
4 meeting with the mayor concerning the
5 impact of these actions and are
6 patiently awaiting a meeting date to be
7 scheduled. In the meantime, I would
8 encourage all those affected by these
9 changes to write to me at Borough Hall
10 explaining how these changes may affect
11 you. I will be happy to forward any
12 feedback I receive to the Department
13 for the Aging for inclusion in this
14 year's hearing results.

15 Thank you.

16 MS. SHAFFER: Our next speaker is
17 Assemblyman Matthew Titone.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN TITONE: Thank you
19 and good morning. Again, thank you for
20 the opportunity to comment on the New
21 York City Department for the Aging
22 annual plan summary for April 2009
23 through March 2010.

24 One way to judge a society is to
25 look at how it treats its elderly, and

2 I want to ensure each of you that New
3 York is judged favorably. Although it
4 is going to be a very tough year, for I
5 don't need to remind you that we have
6 entered an almost unprecedented economic
7 downturn which promises to reduce tax
8 revenue which, in turn, will have a
9 devastating impact on city, state and
10 federal budgets. In fact, Governor
11 Paterson is scheduled to speak today on
12 the economic forecast for the State of
13 New York, and the outlook is grim with
14 a projected \$12 billion deficit.
15 As this budget crisis looms, some
16 will say that we need to curb the
17 influence of special interests, and I
18 say that is true, but I also say that
19 our seniors are not a special interest
20 but a priority. Some will say that we
21 will need to cut waste and unnecessary
22 programs, and I say that that also is
23 true, for we need to be sure that every
24 dollar is honestly and wisely spent,
25 but I also say programs for seniors are

2 not a waste but a necessity. It is
3 ironic, but as the economy worsens and
4 the urgency for government aid for
5 those in need grows, the government's
6 ability to help drops because of a
7 shrinking tax base. The legislature
8 already was called into special session
9 by the governor in August to deal with
10 a budget gap, and we will be called
11 back into special session in mid
12 November to deal with a now
13 ever-widening budget shortfall.
14 Certainly, I cannot promise you
15 no cuts in programs for seniors, for we
16 all take a hit, but what I can promise
17 is that I will fight to ensure that the
18 pain will be equitably distributed and
19 that the most needy will not have to
20 carry an undue burden and service cuts.
21 Lest I leave you all a little
22 depressed with this rainy day, I do
23 want to share some of the small
24 victories we did have this past year.
25 We in the assembly did successfully

2 fight off changes that would have made
3 epic and senior drug coverage more
4 inaccessible, and we were able to widen
5 eligibility to increase funding for
6 HEAP so that people will have more help
7 with handling increased heating costs
8 this winter. And I would urge each of
9 you here, if you are having problems
10 with your heating bill, to contact my
11 office, and we will give you all the
12 information you need and we will file
13 the application for you for assistance.
14 Again, I want to thank you for
15 this opportunity to speak. And I do
16 want to remind the commissioner that
17 when we talk about cuts to the city,
18 that Staten Island is treated fairly
19 and we are not left out when time for
20 financing programs happens. Thank you so much.
21 MS. SHAFFER: Our next speaker,
22 Assemblyman Michael Cusick.
23 ASSEMBLYMAN CUSICK: I don't have
24 a prepared statement, so I'm just going

2 to speak off the cuff. First, I want
3 to thank the Department for being here
4 and listening to the concerns of
5 elected officials and seniors here on
6 Staten Island, and I want to just say
7 thank you to this packed room of
8 concerned citizens. As you can see, to
9 come out on a day like today and to
10 pack this room, there are many
11 concerned seniors and Staten Islanders,
12 so I know that know you're here with
13 open ears and you're going to listen to
14 their concerns. And that's why I'm not
15 going to go on, because I'm sure many
16 of my constituents and the residents of
17 Staten Island want to get up and voice
18 their concern.

19 I just want to say, no one
20 understands better the economic times
21 that we're going through and the budget
22 that the city has and the budget cuts
23 that the state has to make, and I just
24 want to echo what my colleague
25 Assemblyman Titone said, I think there

2 is a way to equitably distribute cuts.
3 And I would like to just say that when
4 it comes to senior centers, there is no
5 better jewel on Staten Island than the
6 senior centers we have here and I
7 firsthand -- I know there's some of my
8 friends here from Todt Hill and Berry.
9 I'm going to confess, I'm there at
10 least once or twice a month for any
11 parties that go on at the senior
12 centers, so I'm here for selfish
13 reasons too, because I like going to
14 the senior centers for the parties.
15 But I just want to say that it's
16 important that we keep in mind that we
17 have to protect our most vulnerable
18 citizens, and that being our seniors.
19 And in the six years that I have been
20 in the state assembly, there has been
21 no better example of how we help and
22 serve our seniors than the senior
23 centers we have here in existence in
24 Staten Island. They are great
25 facilities. They are great managed

2 senior centers that seniors actually
3 look forward to going to. I have
4 learned that it's become part of their
5 life, part of who they are and who
6 their friends are and part of their
7 daily routine, and we should not
8 disrupt that. I know it's tough and I
9 know we have to make a lot of
10 decisions, but I know this term has
11 been used particularly during this
12 political season, there's a way to use
13 a scalpel in making cuts. And I just
14 ask and I beg you as a state legislator
15 because I know in a couple of minutes
16 Governor Paterson is going to make a
17 telephone announcement about what's
18 going on in the budget in New York
19 State, but I ask you in the city, as we
20 go up on November 18th to figure out
21 how we're going to handle this budget
22 crisis, please keep in mind and keep
23 the faces of the seniors that are here
24 today and the fact that they came out
25 in this horrible storm and packed this

2 room shows how important these senior
3 centers are to them and to me and to
4 all of Staten Island.

5 Thank you.

6 MS. SHAFFER: Our next speaker

7 will be Anna Edvin, member of New Dorp
8 Beach Friendship Club.

9 MS. EDVIN: Commissioner

10 Méndez-Santiago, honored guests, ladies
11 and gentlemen, my name is Anna Edvin,
12 and I'm a member of the New Dorp Beach
13 Friendship Club. I would like to thank
14 you, Commissioner, and the Department
15 for the Aging for sponsoring these
16 annual speak-outs where we can air our
17 grievances, if we have any, and bring
18 our problems to you.

19 This year, my request will take
20 an entirely different route. No
21 parking lots. This is serious
22 business. I am here to plead that our
23 centers be kept just as they are. Over
24 the past year, we have all read in the
25 newspapers about proposals to close

2 some centers or alter them in some way.
3 This would be a tragedy of epic
4 proportions.
5 Perhaps this sounds a little
6 melodramatic, but let me explain. I
7 have been a member of the New Dorp
8 Beach Friendship Club for about
9 15 years and have seen it evolve into a
10 wonderful haven for the senior
11 population of our area. At New Dorp,
12 we have a multitude of activities at
13 our disposal. We have -- we enjoy
14 classes in tai chi, chair exercise,
15 arts and crafts, knitting, crocheting
16 and art class done by a retired art
17 teacher. We also do line dancing,
18 social dancing, a walking club,
19 Scrabble, card games, stress release
20 yoga classes and, of course, bingo. We
21 have recently become members of the Wii
22 generation, but more importantly, we
23 have developed lasting friendships.
24 And I am sure the club has been
25 instrumental in the changing of lives

2 of many.
3 Think about it. Someone living
4 alone with no place to go has a
5 tendency to withdraw from society and
6 very often lose much of their ambition,
7 including the desire to prepare meals
8 for themselves and even take time to
9 dress and go out of doors. At our
10 club, you meet with your peers on a
11 daily basis, commiserate with them,
12 participate in two nutritionally sound
13 freshly prepared meals served by our
14 dedicated kitchen staff. Our
15 coordinators who have so many years of
16 experience behind them see to it that
17 we are kept busy all day and take a
18 sincere interest in our well-being.
19 They arrange social and cultural events
20 for us to attend all during the year.
21 We have opportunities to attend
22 meetings and seminars on the many
23 services that are available to us, some
24 of which we were not previously aware
25 of. We have periodic visits from the

2 Visiting Nurse Association of Staten
3 Island during which we have blood
4 pressure screening as well as lectures
5 on sound nutritional habits. We attend
6 citywide functions such as the recent
7 senior stroll and the boardwalk bash
8 held every year where city, state and
9 federal agencies are represented
10 distributing much needed information.
11 The friendship club staff go above and
12 beyond for us.
13 Therefore, Commissioner, I am
14 asking that the Department for the
15 Aging make every effort to keep our
16 centers operating as they are today and
17 staffed by the dedicated, caring and
18 experienced personnel we now have.
19 Thank you very much for your
20 attention.
21 MS. SHAFFER: Our next speaker is
22 Rose Marino, New Dorp Beach Saturday
23 program.
24 MS. MARINO: Good morning. My
25 name is Rose Marino, and I am here to

2 advocate for the seniors on Staten
3 Island and other boroughs.
4 I am usually not a vocal person.
5 However, I feel that it is time for the
6 senior population to speak out and be
7 heard. For the past year, we have been
8 threatened with centers closing,
9 centers merging, modernization of
10 centers, different sponsors and so on
11 and so forth. Our centers, the
12 friendship clubs already are modernized
13 and doing everything the so-called
14 modernized centers will do.
15 To add insult to injury, last
16 week we were advised that the borough
17 president's discretionary funds would
18 no longer fund the only Saturday
19 program on Staten Island because the
20 Department for the Aging advised the
21 borough president that the allocation
22 of discretionary funds by the borough
23 president would end on June 30th, 2009.
24 The services of the bus driver the one
25 day a week would also end because of

2 this resulting in the termination of a
3 bus route.

4 Enough is enough. Although most
5 of us are blonds, perhaps it is time
6 for us to take a lesson from the Gray
7 Panthers who convened in 1972 to speak
8 out against the problems of the
9 retirees. Maggie Khun, founder of the
10 Gray Panthers, said, Old age is an
11 excellent time for outrage. I think
12 they gave us good advice. Perhaps the
13 powers that be should listen to what we
14 have to say. We are a large voting
15 block, and as the Department for the
16 Aging has said many times, we're
17 growing more and more every year.

18 We like to do things in a
19 peaceful manner. However, we can
20 become outraged, and we are not afraid
21 to stand up for the needs and the
22 rights of our senior population,
23 respectfully.

24 Thank you.

25 MS. SHAFFER: Our next speaker is

2 Marie McManus, member of Todt Hill
3 Friendship Club.
4 MS. MCMANUS: Good morning,
5 Commissioner, members of the advisory
6 board and all present. My name is
7 Marie McManus and I am from Todt Hill.
8 The seniors of Staten Island are very
9 frustrated, nervous and truly upset
10 that our senior centers may close.
11 I am a senior at the Todt Hill
12 Friendship Club. When I think that
13 they may shut our friendship club, I
14 just want to ask one question. Why?
15 This is our means of getting together
16 with friends, socializing and staying
17 alive.
18 Some of our seniors do not have
19 the means to purchase food so vital to
20 their health. When they come to the
21 center, they are assured of at least
22 two hot meals a day that give them the
23 nutrition they need. We do not, as the
24 people say, just sit around and play
25 cards and bingo. Every day we have a

2 different program. We do ceramics,
3 arts and crafts, line dancing, board
4 and Wii games along with wellness
5 programs like our walking club,
6 exercise and chair aerobics. We have
7 people in wheelchairs, with canes and
8 walkers who do our chair exercises.
9 Where would they get their exercise?
10 We are vital people and we
11 deserve our friendship club. We feel
12 we have worked all our lives. We have
13 given much to society, and it's time
14 that society gives something back to
15 us. All we are asking for is to be
16 able to enjoy our lives to the fullest
17 for our remaining years.
18 The politicians stop in to see us
19 because they want our vote. We must be
20 important to them. And our centers are
21 important to us. They closed our
22 center for one year for renovations.
23 And during that time, we lost at least
24 49 of our members either to nursing
25 homes or death. Maybe they missed

2 their center and their friends. A
3 television and a rocking chair does not
4 keep you healthy and happy.
5 The coordinators and her
6 assistant at Todt Hill Friendship Club
7 are always there to assist us any way
8 they can. They keep the center running
9 smoothly, and we look forward to seeing
10 them every day. They worry about us.
11 They call us if we are not there for a
12 few days. They make us feel important
13 to them and to our community.
14 Please hear the words, we want
15 our friendship clubs and we love them
16 the way they are. Please help us save
17 our centers and our life-style. Some
18 day you may be old and you will realize
19 what we are fighting for.
20 Thank you.
21 MS. SHAFFER: Next speaker, Joan
22 Gugliucci.
23 MS. GUGLIUCCI: Good morning,
24 Commissioner, members of the advisory
25 council. My name is Joan Gugliucci.

2 For the past year, our seniors
3 have had fears about what might happen
4 to us. The mere thought of having no
5 continuity where the Staten Island
6 community friendship clubs are
7 concerned is unthinkable. The
8 sponsorship of the Staten Island
9 community services is essential for the
10 constant and continued success in the
11 lives of our senior citizens.
12 We are not just a meeting place.
13 We play an active role in the health
14 and welfare of our members. The
15 funding for the food programs cannot
16 and should not be jeopardized.
17 Breakfast and lunch are some of the
18 only meals our seniors get in a day.
19 Besides the attention we pay to
20 nutrition, it's a time where the
21 seniors get to communicate with fellow
22 peers and build lasting friendships
23 that are crucial to their well-being.
24 The center gives seniors a feeling of
25 belonging, a safe harbor. We work

2 diligently to foster relationships with
3 not only the seniors, but their
4 families as well. Trust and security
5 is what the members of our friendship
6 clubs strive for.

7 Our programs are a proven
8 success. Our attendance and
9 participation is proof of that.

10 Wellness of the seniors is always a
11 main focus at our center, providing tai
12 chi, yoga, stretching, low impact
13 aerobics, chair exercises and
14 activities that target all of the
15 seniors no matter the age or the level
16 of their mobility. We have programs
17 that emphasize stress reduction and
18 relaxation. We take care of the
19 wellness of not only the body, but of
20 their minds. We reach out to everyone
21 on every level. As a matter of fact,
22 due to the overwhelming interest in our
23 varied activities, we have to add
24 classes to accommodate the many people
25 interested in attending. We have a

2 walking club that is so popular that
3 there are days two buses are required
4 to take the seniors to and from the
5 boardwalk. Trips are planned
6 throughout year for as many as 98
7 people participating on any given trip.
8 The friendship clubs aren't about
9 food and trips, obviously. It's about
10 bringing people together in support of
11 one another. It's about building a
12 strong sense of belonging within the
13 community.
14 Our center is a part of life
15 routine to many seniors that come each
16 and every day. We aren't a place that
17 people visit but rather a family to
18 those who spend their time with us. We
19 believe that our seniors are happier,
20 healthier and more adjusted because of
21 the atmosphere we work so feverishly to
22 provide and maintain.
23 Many seniors have lost loved ones
24 and spouses, are lonely or sick but
25 find a reason to get up in the morning

2 and participate in all we offer. Like
3 our seniors say, If it ain't broke,
4 don't fix it. The Arrochar Friendship
5 Club works helping our seniors to
6 thrive. With your help, we will
7 continue to grow and touch the lives of
8 many in our community. Please help us
9 to remain making the difference for our
10 most precious seniors. Keep the
11 friendship clubs alive. We need it.
12 We count on it.

13 Respectfully submitted.

14 MS. SHAFFER: I'm going to read
15 for you a couple of members' names that
16 I don't know if they are here. Jean
17 Russo.

18 MS. RUSSO: Yes.

19 MS. SHAFFER: Okay, Jean. Come
20 on up.

21 MS. RUSSO: Good morning,
22 Commissioner, advisory council members
23 and all attending. My name is Jean
24 Russo from the Mount Loretto Friendship
25 Club. I wish to thank you in advance

2 for this opportunity to speak to you
3 regarding our center.
4 Our membership exceeds
5 approximately 800 or more members with
6 a daily attendance of over 175 seniors
7 each day. They fully utilize all the
8 activities the club has to offer, and
9 it is great exercise for a senior's
10 body and mind.
11 I would like to walk you through
12 the many activities made available to
13 our Mount Loretto seniors that are
14 usually filled to capacity; Monday,
15 stress reduction class; Tuesday, arts
16 and craft class; Wednesday, tai chi
17 class, which is eagerly looked forward
18 to; Thursday, movies are shown and are
19 as good and any theater; Friday, line
20 dancing class. The seniors have a
21 great time and love to dance. In
22 addition to all of this, there is a
23 walking club, a bowling league, Wii
24 games, puzzle table, computer classes,
25 knitting groups and a library stacked

2 with many gifts our seniors read with
3 anticipation. Last, but not least, is
4 our billiard room with two pool tables,
5 with an atmosphere of a real pool hall.
6 The laughter of the men shouting and
7 the fun they have every day lifts
8 everyone's spirits up.
9 Mount Loretto offers balanced and
10 nourishing meals each day which are
11 well-prepared by our kitchen staff in
12 an immaculate kitchen. Perhaps these
13 will be the only full meals some
14 seniors may have that day, and they are
15 not eating alone. Please realize that
16 Mount Loretto is a great place for
17 socialization, enjoying each other's
18 friendship and often checking on each
19 other if someone is absent that day.
20 Mount Loretto is a successful senior
21 center made up of many factors,
22 starting with a coordinator who is
23 compassionate and understanding and an
24 associate with similar values. It's
25 where many volunteers do multitask with

2 a smile. But most importantly, it's a
3 place where the seniors look forward to
4 arrive each day. We are a
5 community-minded center. Since 2001,
6 every September 11, we visit the local
7 firehouse in remembrance of that day
8 with the goods donated by local stores.
9 During the holiday season, we gather
10 items for the troops to be shipped
11 overseas. Another project of ours is
12 the Christmas toy drive for the
13 children of our military who are
14 serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.
15 We, the seniors of Mount Loretto,
16 love our center and wish to keep it
17 just the way it is. Please don't
18 change it. As you can see, Mount
19 Loretto feeds the body, the mind, the
20 soul and the spirit; in other words,
21 the whole person.
22 On behalf of all the seniors on
23 Staten Island who I am sure feel the
24 same way I do, I am imploring the
25 Department for the Aging to please

2 leave our senior centers as is. We are
3 already modernized and do not need to
4 be modernized or reconstructed.

5 Thank you. Respectfully

6 submitted, Jean Russo.

7 MS. SHAFFER: Thank you.

8 Rocco Valenti, member, Great

9 Kills Friendship Club.

10 MR. VALENTI: Good morning,

11 Commissioner. My name is Rocco Valenti

12 with the Great Kills Friendship Club, a

13 21-year member.

14 During the last several months,

15 we have been hearing upsetting news

16 about restructuring, combining and

17 possibly closing some senior centers.

18 I can tell you firsthand what the

19 friendship club really means to its

20 members and to me personally. It's our

21 home away from home. It is a place to

22 meet friends, socialize, travel and

23 improve our health. We have made many

24 close and long-lasting friends and also

25 enjoy the many entertaining and

2 interesting activities that we provide.
3 On any given day, we can enjoy
4 tai chi, stress reduction, dancing
5 instruction, nutrition counseling,
6 blood pressure checking, walking clubs,
7 bowling, card games, arts and crafts
8 and bingo. We also enjoy competing in
9 the variety of Wii tournaments that are
10 offered. We add monthly parties with
11 music and dancing, trips to Atlantic
12 City as well as overnight and five day
13 trips to many interesting destinations.
14 They offer something for everyone.
15 These are activities that would be
16 difficult for many seniors to
17 participate in on their own. We are
18 certainly not just bingo.
19 Many of our members live alone
20 and without the ability to attend the
21 centers would remain at home with very
22 little social contact. Many of our
23 children do not live nearby and our
24 spouses have passed away and some of us
25 have difficulty cooking our own meals.

2 That's me. When we arrive at the
3 center and smell the fresh cooked food,
4 it gives us a warm and welcome feeling.
5 Some of us are not able to grocery shop
6 or cook the wonderful nutritious meals
7 that are provided. That's me again.
8 They offer us delicious home cooking
9 for a reasonable donation which is
10 truly appreciated by many of us on a
11 fixed income. They also provide bus
12 service for those of us who cannot
13 drive to the center.
14 Attending the center fills the
15 gap in our lives caused by aging,
16 failing health and social isolation.
17 The friendship clubs help keep us young
18 at heart and gives us a sense of
19 belonging to a family who cares about
20 us and listens to our concerns. It is
21 wonderful to share our joys and our
22 sorrows with people of the same age who
23 can relate to our problems. If we do
24 not attend for a while, someone will
25 call us to be sure that we are fine,

2 and that's a comforting feeling.
3 We have been hearing about
4 modernizing the senior centers to
5 provide more activities for the influx
6 of aging baby boomers. Our centers
7 currently provide all the activities
8 that a senior of any age could possibly
9 need. They also offer activities that
10 are less strenuous for our older
11 members. There is a definite need to
12 have a place where these older seniors
13 can attend and participate in
14 activities according to each health
15 limitation.
16 We all feel blessed to have
17 access to a place called the friendship
18 club in our lives. We implore the
19 Department for the Aging to help them
20 continue to do the wonderful job of
21 enriching our lives. We hopefully look
22 forward to belonging and enjoying these
23 centers for many years to come.
24 Respectfully yours, Rocco
25 Valenti.

2 MS. SHAFFER: Gerry Nicoletti,
3 member of Berry Houses.
4 MS. NICOLETTI: Good morning,
5 Commissioner, advisory council members
6 and all present. My name is Gerry
7 Nicoletti from the Berry Friendship
8 Club.
9 For the past several months, we
10 have read in the newspapers that
11 centers will be closing. We, the
12 members of the Berry Friendship Club,
13 want all concerned parties to know how
14 important our center is to us. Our
15 center is a lifeline, a second home
16 where we are able to interact with
17 others who are the same age, to be able
18 to eat and enjoy nutritious breakfast
19 and lunch in the company of friends.
20 If we are missing from the center for
21 even one day, everyone, including the
22 staff, takes the time to call us at
23 home to make sure we are okay. Many of
24 us have children that do not live on
25 Staten Island so we look forward to

2 having somewhere to go every day.
3 Our sponsors, Stated Island
4 Community Services, have gone above and
5 beyond to ensure that we are well taken
6 care of on all fronts. We have a
7 multitude of activities daily,
8 including ceramics, dancing, Wii and
9 Wii Fitness, jewelry making, computer
10 classes to include -- name a few. In
11 addition, our sponsor has focused their
12 attention on our wellness. We are
13 provided with blood pressure screening
14 monthly. After that, our exercise
15 classes, tai chi, our walking group and
16 our bowling league. We want our
17 present sponsors to continue on for
18 many years to come.
19 Because of all provided to us
20 every day, we have something to look
21 forward to, a reason to get up every
22 day, get dressed and get out. All of
23 this would be lost to us, and we would
24 end up vegetating at home. After a
25 short time, lack of socialization and

2 activities would take its toll on our
3 health. Our wonderfully freshly cooked
4 meals would become a thing of the past.
5 And make no mistake, some of us are
6 counting on those meals. Sometimes
7 it's the only affordable nutritious
8 meals we get in a day.
9 At the senior stroll, we listened
10 to Commissioner Santiago express the
11 importance of staying active and
12 participating in center activities. He
13 said, If not for centers, people would
14 be sitting home in rocking chairs.
15 Centers keep us young and active. If
16 you take away daily socialization and
17 meals, then the focus on wellness will
18 have been in vain and our health would
19 rapidly deteriorate. Loneliness will
20 have such an impact and will create new
21 health issues. We will have nowhere to
22 go and nothing to look forward to.
23 Remember, seniors are not just a group
24 of people that come to a building but,
25 rather, a family. They have created a

2 community. It would be a great
3 injustice to close such a wonderful
4 facility. The lives of the surrounding
5 community and its members are better
6 just for the efforts of this facility.
7 We seniors have given much. We
8 have survived the Depression, fought in
9 two world wars, Korea and Vietnam.
10 We've worked hard all our lives, and
11 all we ask is that we are allowed to
12 spend our twilight years enjoying what
13 we have worked for.
14 Respectfully submitted.
15 MS. SHAFFER: Joseph Tornello,
16 Staten Island Meals on Wheels.
17 MR. TORNELLO: First of all,
18 before you start my clock, I just want
19 to thank the various DFTA that said to
20 me, Joe, I'm sorry you have to wait.
21 No need to apologize. I have
22 enjoyed listening to our seniors and
23 their testimony, and I would be here
24 anyway, even if I wasn't in earlier.
25 But it is a pleasure to be here today.

2 I'm using my old glasses, which
3 my daughter has criticized. Dad, you
4 got to get rid of those old glasses,
5 reading glasses.

6 Good morning, Commissioner
7 Méndez-Santiago and the staff from the
8 New York City Department for the Aging.

9 I will be presenting testimony this
10 morning on behalf of two entities,
11 first from Meals on Wheels of Staten
12 Island, Incorporated, where I have the
13 privilege to work as president and CEO.

14 I will also offer testimony on behalf
15 of Community Board Number Two where for
16 over the past ten years, I have served
17 as chairperson of the Aging Committee.

18 First, I'm very happy to be
19 standing here this morning to say that
20 Meals on Wheels of Staten Island has
21 been awarded the new contract with DFTA
22 to provide home-delivered meals on
23 Staten Island, enabling this wonderful
24 organization to continue its legacy of
25 service which dates back to 1972, a

2 history that we can say we share with
3 the Department for the Aging. I can
4 also say that we have appreciated the
5 commissioner's reference to Meals on
6 Wheels of Staten Island as a model of
7 home-delivered meal services, and I
8 assure you that our efforts will be
9 focused on furthering this sense of
10 appreciation.

11 We have great challenges before
12 us that we will meet in order to
13 respond -- and I did underline and bold
14 "will" -- we will meet in order to
15 respond to the beyond nutrition needs
16 of our community for our frail aging
17 population. I use the phrase beyond
18 nutrition to elevate the perception of
19 what we do as starting with ensuring
20 the delivery of quality nutrition,
21 including two meals daily, each meeting
22 one-third RDA nutritional requirements
23 of our recipients as well as the
24 delivery of weekend meals to a
25 significant number of our meal

2 recipients. We look forward to working
3 with the JCC Kosher Nutrition Program
4 which as our subcontractor will
5 continue to provide kosher and also
6 halal meals to meal recipients.
7 But beyond the nutrition, we are
8 in the unique position to have daily
9 direct contact with our recipients,
10 either by our paid drivers, volunteers
11 or one of our staff. With an average
12 age of over 84 and a very high
13 percentage of recipients with some
14 mobility limitation, chronic illness
15 and complex medication regimen, this
16 contact is often the often the only
17 face-to-face contacts recipients have
18 with another person each day. All too
19 often, this contact has provided the
20 alert for an emergency intervention for
21 a recipient who is in crisis, and we
22 have been there to help. With over 300
23 volunteers, most of whom in delivering
24 meals are unappreciated -- most of whom
25 serve in delivering meals, an

2 unappreciated fact is that most of
3 these volunteer meal deliverers are
4 retired older adults who give their
5 time and resources to help their frail
6 neighbors. I cannot say enough about
7 how impressed I am with these people.
8 I must add that we fully
9 appreciate that the option of delivery
10 of weekday frozen meals is part of our
11 new contract. In fact, our staff has
12 recognized how this option will serve
13 to extend our ability to serve the
14 elderly community who cannot be home
15 each day to receive a hot meal, perhaps
16 those who go for dialysis or
17 chemotherapy or will be out of their
18 home for other reasons. We also
19 appreciate the need to coordinate and
20 partner with the case management
21 agencies which now have as part of
22 their full case management assessment
23 -- which now as part of their full case
24 management assessment will perform
25 home-delivered meal evaluation, and

2 they are the conduit of referrals for
3 our services. Additionally, I am proud
4 to be part of a borough of aging
5 services providers who recognize that
6 the real strength in what we do is our
7 collaboration as we mobilize our
8 combined strengths and efforts to serve
9 our elderly population.
10 Our challenges lie before us.
11 City planning projects a very
12 significant growth of the older adult
13 population by 2010, 2020 and reaching a
14 full 100 percent increase by 2030. As
15 we start our new contract, we are
16 already overserving the number of meals
17 budgeted for Staten Island. Our meal
18 recipient census has grown by almost
19 ten percent since the issuance of the
20 RFP in May of this year. Our current,
21 or should I say immediate challenge is
22 how to maintain the present and growing
23 need for services in light of the city,
24 state and national economic crisis and
25 its impact on government revenues.

2 Most of us rely on a combination of
3 city/state-funded and community
4 fundraising initiatives, both of which
5 to some extent are in jeopardy.
6 Since I'm doing two things, can I
7 have a little extra time?
8 As we are advised that add-on
9 funding will no longer be available and
10 we lose borough president discretionary
11 funds, our challenge to meet the need
12 is increased. We look to DFTA to find
13 a way to protect these additional
14 funding resources to keep it available
15 for services. On our end, we will
16 extend our efforts to find additional
17 funding sources to maintain our history
18 of serving all of our elderly citizens
19 in need of home-delivered meals.
20 As chairperson of the Community
21 Board Two Aging Committee, I will
22 add concerns presented by the committee
23 which include support of our Staten
24 Island Interagency Council For Aging.
25 We are very concerned at the loss

2 of borough president discretionary
3 funds which, channelled through DFTA,
4 has provided primary support for IAC.
5 I say our IAC because that's how we
6 perceive this agency. Our community
7 service needs have increased, and, as I
8 expressed earlier, we need to support
9 the collaboration of our efforts to
10 serve our elderly population. The IAC
11 has provided this very critical role to
12 enable our unified and coordinated
13 approach. If borough president
14 discretionary funding is lost, then we
15 ask DFTA to find a way to fund the IAC
16 and keep it open. A similar loss of
17 funds is affecting other smaller grass
18 roots agencies, including the
19 Alzheimer's Foundation and Richmond
20 Senior Services which are losing this
21 funding.
22 As we await the issuance of the
23 RFP for senior centers, and many of the
24 centers on Staten Island are located in
25 NYCHA sites, we are concerned about

2 what our senior center community will
3 look like at the end of this
4 contracting process.
5 We again ask DFTA to support the
6 development of affordable housing for
7 older adults on Staten Island. Park
8 Lane on this campus, Sea View campus
9 has remained true to the original Sea
10 View proposal and will represent about
11 100 affordable rental units ready for
12 2009. The much larger Northern Parcel
13 proposal has had a more disturbing
14 recent history as units primarily for
15 purchase were not seen as affordable.
16 For decades, the aging services
17 community has advocated for large scale
18 affordable housing at this location,
19 and we ask DFTA to be part of this
20 advocacy effort.
21 Thank you.
22 MS. SHAFFER: Thank you.
23 Angela Mazza (phonetic), Sea View
24 executive director?
25 Beverly Neuhouse, executive

2 director of Richmond Senior Services.
3 MS. NEUHOUSE: Good morning.
4 First, I would like to thank
5 Commissioner Méndez-Santiago and the
6 Department for the Aging
7 representatives for this opportunity to
8 speak and also to thank you for all the
9 services that have been and are being
10 provided through DFTA.
11 Our senior home repair program
12 which was funded by the borough
13 president through his discretionary
14 funds for close to 20 years has been
15 defunded. This program probably added
16 up to about 10,000 home repairs for
17 seniors on Staten Island over that
18 period of time. We provide affordable
19 minor health- and safety-related
20 repairs, physical grab bars in the
21 shower, tub, handrails in staircases,
22 toilet repairs, changing ceiling light
23 bulbs and many, many other small but
24 very important repairs for seniors.
25 These are crucial to some of our

2 seniors, and it helps them maintain
3 their homes, to be able to stay at home
4 and it also maintains their
5 independence so they can get out and
6 participate in community activities and
7 get to their medical appointments.
8 And although these are minor
9 repairs, we also provide them with
10 someone on staff that they can call us
11 and we know who's coming to their homes
12 and they know that they can save --
13 probably some of these repairs might
14 cost them five times as much if they
15 tried to find someone to do it. It's a
16 very secure way, and we provide this
17 for a couple of days a week. It's
18 become so very, very important to them,
19 and we have lost the ability to do that
20 and that's a great loss to them.
21 The \$15,000, the investment of
22 that \$15,000 through the borough
23 president's discretionary fund to this
24 program probably saves about ten times
25 more over in larger maintenance costs.

2 When we catch these repairs early, they
3 don't expand into something that's
4 going to be much, much, much more
5 costly. It also helps them in their
6 health costs. It provides for a better
7 home living situation.

8 We urge the restoration of
9 funding to the borough president's
10 discretionary funds to enable us to
11 continue this program for our seniors
12 on Staten Island.

13 Thank you.

14 THE COMMISSIONER: May we get a
15 copy of your testimony?

16 MS. SHAFFER: Marya Gilborn,
17 Family Center.

18 MS. GILBORN: Thank you for the
19 opportunity to be here today to speak
20 about the needs of a special group of
21 older New Yorkers, grandparents raising
22 grandchildren.

23 My name is Marya Gilborn, and I'm
24 a social worker and director of the
25 Family Center's Second Time Around

2 program. For almost five years, we
3 have been New York City's sole
4 DFTA-funded program providing support
5 for grandparent caregivers through
6 funds from the National Family
7 Caregiver Support Program. During
8 these hearings, you will be hearing
9 from several of our clients across the
10 boroughs, so my purpose today is to
11 give an overview of our program and to
12 thank you and request your continued
13 support for this vulnerable population.
14 Since 2004, The Family Center has
15 provided comprehensive services to over
16 350 grandparents age 60 and over.
17 These are grandparents raising
18 grandchildren or other children,
19 great-grandchildren, due to parental
20 loss, absence, illness. Somebody
21 mentioned military deployment. That is
22 a reason for grandparents raising
23 grandchildren, as well as the World
24 Trade Center disaster. We serve
25 grandparents in all five boroughs of

2 New York and want to express our
3 continued commitment to serving
4 grandparents in every corner of the
5 city. We provide short-term
6 information and referral and telephone
7 support services for countless
8 additional grandparents each year, yet
9 this is the only a fraction of the need
10 in our city. The census estimates that
11 there are some 82,000 grandparent
12 caregivers in the five boroughs, so
13 there's much more work to be done here.
14 These families are among New
15 York's most profoundly challenged.
16 They live in some of the city's most
17 marginalized neighborhoods. We have
18 clients in all boroughs who will be
19 offering testimony before this body.
20 Most live at or below the poverty line.
21 They face issues of poverty,
22 disability, mobility and often have
23 significant health challenges which
24 come with age and they're raising small
25 children. Most have long since raised

2 their own children and few ever
3 expected to be taking care of children
4 the second time around. Yet these
5 caregivers have stepped forward when
6 nobody else in the child's life is
7 willing and able to care for them.
8 This often comes at a huge cost,
9 economic as well as the cost to their
10 physical and mental health and quality
11 of life.
12 We provide a range of services
13 for these families including
14 individual, couple and family
15 counseling, caregiver peer support
16 programs, case management benefits and
17 entitlements assistance and legal
18 representation in the areas of custody
19 and guardianship and advance directive.
20 We also provide support with housing
21 referrals and permanency planning
22 services. All of our services are free
23 and provided in multiple languages and
24 available in clients' homes throughout
25 the five boroughs when needed.

2 We help these seniors who are
3 giving so much of themselves, and we
4 recognize they are trying to do right
5 by the children in their care, to keep
6 their families intact and to save
7 public dollars. Our work is to do
8 whatever we can to help them do that.
9 Every dollar spent here means a dollar
10 not spent to care for children in
11 foster care. More important, it pays
12 immense human dividends by helping
13 our oldest citizens who have extended
14 their hands across the generations.
15 Your annual plan acknowledges a
16 rapidly growing number of elderly,
17 specifically minority and low income
18 elderly, and we anticipate that this
19 will mean only increasing demand for
20 services. We want to acknowledge the
21 support we have gotten from DFTA as
22 well as the grandparent resource center
23 at DFTA and other CBOs and community
24 organizations.
25 But really, what I want to do

2 today is not just request your
3 continued support for our program, but
4 more critically at this moment, I want
5 to request that as DFTA reevaluates all
6 its programs and contracts, it will
7 seek to ensure that all grandparent
8 caregivers can access the range of
9 services that DFTA has to offer in
10 their own communities.
11 I'm touched to see so many people
12 from senior centers. As I know the
13 commissioner understands, grandparents
14 raising grandchildren find it very
15 difficult to make it to the senior
16 center, so anything we can do to make
17 all your services accessible to these
18 clients will be greatly appreciated.

19 Thank you.

20 MS. SHAFFER: Teddy Kern,

21 VISIONS.

22 MS. KERN: Thank you for this
23 opportunity to testify. My name is
24 Teddy Kern, and I am the director of
25 occupational therapy and medical

2 director at VISIONS/Services For The
3 Blind and Visually Impaired, a
4 nonprofit agency promoting the
5 independence each year of over 3,000
6 people who are blind and visually
7 impaired in all five boroughs. More
8 than half of the blind people we assist
9 each year are over the age of 60. All
10 services are provided free of charge,
11 and no health insurance is required.
12 VISIONS is a citywide vision
13 rehabilitation and social service
14 agency specializing in serving seniors
15 who are visually impaired, who are of
16 low or limited income, who speak a
17 language other than English, primarily
18 Spanish, Cantonese and Russian, have
19 multiple disabilities and are high risk
20 for vision loss, particularly
21 African-American and Hispanic seniors
22 who are have a higher incidence of
23 diabetes and glaucoma.
24 We provide services completely
25 free of charge to Staten Island

2 residents as well all over the Island.
3 I travel from New York City to Staten
4 Island three days a week to provide
5 these services with my colleague. We
6 provide services in the clients' homes.
7 They have vision loss, they have many
8 other physical disabilities and are in
9 need of rehabilitation for whatever
10 functional losses they experience.
11 We applaud DFTA's annual plan
12 which recognizes the special needs of
13 the growing elderly population with
14 sensory impairments. In New York City,
15 they are an estimated 34,000 elders age
16 65 and older who are blind and 217,000
17 age 65 and older who are visually
18 impaired. This number is expected to
19 quadruple by 2030.
20 Today we would like to make the
21 following recommendations on the DFTA
22 plan: I'm just going to abbreviate.
23 To restore funding for senior centers
24 and multigenerational centers to be
25 vital community hubs for information,

2 activities and resources. We provide
3 services also in addition to in
4 people's homes, we provide services in
5 senior centers and some of the nursing
6 homes on Staten Island. To ensure
7 access to benefits for seniors with
8 vision loss. Also, to fund outreach to
9 the visually impaired population and
10 underserved populations on Staten
11 Island.

12 Question: How can DFTA best
13 support the aging network, particularly
14 senior centers, in establishing
15 prevention programs to promote healthy
16 aging? The question is where is the
17 money to do this.

18 VISIONS lost \$32,500 plus a three
19 percent cut this year of DFTA funding.
20 How can we expand with fewer dollars?
21 Why weren't seniors programs spared
22 from cuts when the Mayor's Commission
23 on Economic Opportunity defines year
24 three as living in poverty? DFTA
25 should focus with New York City

2 Department of Transportation on
3 installing audible pedestrian signals
4 throughout New York City. We strongly
5 encourage this.

6 Senior employment is a critical
7 area as well. Where is the financial
8 investment of the city to inform
9 seniors and providers of the solutions
10 and the equipment necessary that has
11 been proven successful?

12 VISIONS workforce development and
13 job placement services has been
14 enabling blind seniors to continue
15 working for several years, especially
16 in Staten Island.

17 What approach can programs use to
18 address a diverse population?

19 Encourage hiring and maintaining staff
20 that reflect the diverse population of
21 Staten Island to obtain services from
22 all the DFTA-funded programs.

23 Encourage the creation of partnerships
24 with ethnic-based organizations and
25 businesses to assist in developing a

2 work -- a plan to work with DFTA-funded
3 programs. Where is DFTA's commitment
4 to community outreach when it defunds
5 these efforts?

6 We ask you strongly to restore
7 funding distributed by the borough
8 presidents.

9 In closing, we ask you,
10 Commissioner, in this budget crisis to
11 allow us at VISIONS to continue our
12 partnership of many, many years with
13 you, to navigate this crisis to ensure
14 quality decisions and increased funding
15 that impact on the aging elder and
16 vision loss community of Staten Island.
17 Thank you for this opportunity to
18 speak.

19 MS. SHAFFER: Thank you.

20 Are there any other speakers?

21 Carol?

22 MS. DUNN: I have to add
23 something to the record. I have never
24 heard so many wonderful speakers
25 present. Phenomenal.

2 Thank you again for being here.
3 On behalf of the Staten Island
4 Interagency Council For Aging, I would
5 like to thank you for the opportunity
6 to participate in this public hearing.
7 The Staten Island Interagency
8 Council for Aging is an advocacy group
9 established in 1976 to identify and
10 address the needs of the borough's
11 older adults. The IAC is comprised of
12 65 organizations who provide services
13 to the older population on Staten
14 Island. The mission of the IAC is to
15 facilitate and promote programs and
16 services for our aging population,
17 advocating for their health care,
18 housing, education, social, financial
19 and transportation needs. The IAC
20 membership is committed to the
21 well-being of older adults residing on
22 Staten Island.
23 Our borough president and
24 councilmen have for over 20 years
25 continually supported the efforts of

2 the many senior service agencies
3 through their discretionary funding.
4 DFTA has decided that the borough
5 presidents should no longer have the
6 ability to make the determination as to
7 what services are to be funded. This
8 has nothing to do with budget cuts and
9 will only be to the detriment of the
10 service providers in their ability to
11 serve their seniors, the JCC, CASC,
12 Meals on Wheels of Staten Island, to
13 name just a few of the direct service
14 providers who will be negatively
15 impacted. The current list of service
16 providers that have had their funding
17 suspended by DFTA include Richmond
18 Senior Services, the Day Program at Sea
19 View, et cetera. The number of older
20 adults have and will continue to
21 increase as well as their diversity,
22 and obviously so will the need for
23 services.
24 We are unique on Staten Island in
25 that we have a network of service

2 providers that really work together,
3 even though recently much has had to
4 change due to the requirements of the
5 new contracts adversely affecting the
6 clients and service providers. They
7 really care about the quality of their
8 services to those in need.

9 I am fortunate to work with some
10 of the most dedicated and caring
11 people, such as the Community Agency
12 for Senior Citizens, JCC, Meals on
13 Wheels, et cetera. Their services
14 range from providing nutritious meals
15 to the homebound which may be their
16 only contact to the outside world that
17 day to the Community Agency For Senior
18 Citizens who provide a vast array of
19 services.

20 There are those organizations
21 that provide health care including
22 mental health services, home care,
23 adult day care for the frail elderly
24 and those in need of special medical
25 services, senior centers and friendship

2 clubs that all contribute to the
3 quality of life of our older adults.
4 In many cases, these services are the
5 means by which a person can remain in
6 their home.
7 Meals on Wheels in order to
8 increase the quality of food and
9 service and yet be cost effective built
10 a kitchen which took years of careful
11 planning and research before it could
12 be done. But like everything else they
13 do, it was built on caring and carrying
14 out their mission to the homebound.
15 The Community Agency for Senior
16 Citizens offers housing, crime
17 prevention and help against elder
18 abuse, transportation,
19 intergenerational activities as well as
20 expanding the existing housing so that
21 those in need will have a safe and
22 comfortable home. They are also
23 responsible for four senior centers on
24 Staten Island, including New Lane,
25 Cassidy Coles, South Beach and Forever

2 Young.

3 Senior centers and friendship

4 clubs have continually evolved to meet

5 the needs of the seniors to create a

6 warm and secure environment as well as

7 an enriched environment, and they are

8 under terrible stress due to the

9 impending RFPs which appear to be

10 another misstep in the current -- I

11 have play here by mistake. Maybe it's

12 a play on words -- plan to change

13 services to the senior.

14 There is RSVP/Serve that

15 specializes in developing the talents

16 of volunteers, then sharing and

17 matching those abilities with many of

18 the organizations on Staten Island.

19 This allows people the opportunity to

20 realize their continued value to

21 society as well as enhancing the

22 services of the organizations at which

23 they volunteer.

24 These providers are faced with an

25 ever increasing demand for their

2 services. We must remember that it's
3 not just a matter of survival but being
4 able to provide quality services.
5 Therefore, we must all work closely
6 together in spite of negative
7 requirements.
8 Agencies continually fundraise,
9 solicit funding from other sources to
10 complement their public funding and are
11 united in the goal to serve the senior
12 population but sadly are faced with
13 hurdles that are totally unnecessary.
14 Thank you and respectfully
15 submitted.

16 MS. SHAFFER: I would like to
17 thank all our speakers today and the
18 staff coordinating this event. The
19 agency will issue a formal response to
20 your testimony sometime in November,
21 and you can look at our web site. We
22 encourage you to look at our web site,
23 NYC.gov/aging.
24 And if there are no other
25 speakers, then I officially close this

2 hearing.

3 (TIME NOTED: 11:37 A.M.)

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2 CERTIFICATION

3

4 I, Victoria Gilgurd-Karen, a

5 Notary Public in and for the State of New

6 York, do hereby certify:

7 THAT the foregoing is a true and

8 accurate transcript of my stenographic

9 notes.

10 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have

11 hereunto set my hand this 9th day of

12 November 2008.

13

14

15 -----

16 VICTORIA GILGURD-KAREN

17

18

19

PRECISE COURT REPORTING

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