

Testimony Submitted by
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to the

Assembly Standing Committee on Aging
Assembly Standing Committee on Cities
Assembly Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs and Protection
Assembly Subcommittee on Outreach and Oversight of Senior
Citizen Programs
regarding

Ensuring that Seniors Retain Access to Essential Supports During the Aging Services
Modernization Initiative in New York City

250 Broadway
Assembly Hearing Room 1923
New York City

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Good morning. My name is Michael Burgess and I am the Director of the New York State Office for the Aging. I would like to thank all of you - Assembly members Dinowitz, Brennan, Pheffer and Boyland - for the opportunity to testify today, for your longstanding advocacy on behalf of all older New Yorkers and for your support for senior services during the recent budget process.

Let me first begin by stating that the New York State Office for the Aging's agenda is predicated on establishing the following:

- Affordable choices and options that promote independence and dignity of older adults and support their overwhelming desire to remain at home.
- A system that will give consumers control and meaningful involvement in the design and delivery of the programs and services that affect their lives.
- A system where consumers will be fully empowered to make informed decisions about their care options and where people can easily access a full range of health and long-term care supports.
- A system that provides high quality, flexible services and supports that can respond to the unique and ever changing needs of individual consumers and their family caregivers.
- A system that promotes healthy aging through disease prevention and health promotion.

For this vision to become a reality the aging services network, comprised of NYSOFA, the area agencies on aging and their subcontractors and other aging services providers, must play a central role in modernizing long-term care and community based services for elderly individuals and assisting communities in helping seniors age successfully in place. Even in this time of fiscal turmoil, Governor Paterson has recognized and provided us with needed funding to support older adults and caregivers – family, friends, and neighbors in the recently enacted 2008-2009 budget. I also thank all of you in supporting those initiatives – Centers for Excellence in Caregiving, respite, enhanced social adult day care and community empowerment.

NYSOFA, in partnership with the Administration on Aging and New York's network of 59 area agencies on aging have begun to develop and implement several important strategies to modernize senior services. In addition to considering efficiencies in service delivery, NYSOFA's modernization agenda includes encouraging the AAA's to play a more prominent role in long-term care with a clear focus on person-centered programs and an emphasis on health promotion and wellness, healthy aging and prevention. These strategies include: ***NY Connects – Choices for Long Term Care*** (NY's program for a single point of entry); focusing on the implementation of evidence-based health and wellness promotion and disease prevention strategies; modernizing long-term care to focus on nursing home diversion - targeting those individuals who are at risk of Medicaid spend down and nursing home placement; and developing support services for caregivers.

I am in full support of efforts by the area agencies on aging across the state to engage in a critical dialogue about the growing needs of older adults, families, and caregivers. The current service delivery system was developed over 40 years ago and as with any system, it should be evaluated and re-evaluated continually to ensure that it meets the changing needs of those whom it is intended to serve and can adapt to societal changes by embracing best practices and new ways of serving older consumers.

As you are aware, our Project 2015 planning initiative set forth a number of factors that communities across the state should use to examine existing programs and begin to prepare for these changes through the development and implementation of plans that will help older New Yorkers age in place. These factors include the changing demographics of the state and its communities, the increase in cultural and ethnic minorities, the reduction in the size of families and the number of informal caregivers and the fact that individuals are living longer and with complex medical and chronic conditions. The goal of our network, which provides direct personal services to people, is simple: we seek to maintain a caring system for the seniors and caregivers of today, while working to modernize management and programs for a growing new generation.

Communities across New York, such as in New York City, Westchester and Monroe Counties, are working to become more elder friendly so that residents can age successfully in place. This includes making changes to their delivery systems by engaging the public - policy makers, consumers, providers and other stakeholders. We support this trend. NYSOFA will work with the Legislature to address any questions and concerns raised by modernization proposals statewide. We expect modernization efforts throughout the state to increase as localities plan for, and respond to the changes that the older population will bring to their communities.

In New York City, the age 60 and older population is the fastest growing age cohort and is expected to increase by 46 percent (to 1.3 million seniors) by 2030. By 2030, 20 percent of the City's residents will be seniors (up from 15 percent as of the 2005 census) and in the next 25 years the population age 60 and older will be larger than the size of school-aged children. It is these demographics and other indicators that have led to DFTA and the City to spearhead a comprehensive examination of aging services back in December 2006 and subsequently to announce a modernization effort in January 2008.

New York State Office for the Aging Role

The Older Americans Act (OAA) provides each AAA (DFTA is the AAA for the City of New York) with the flexibility to design programs that best meet the needs in its community. To assure compliance with the Older Americans Act, each AAA is required to submit an annual plan regarding the general use of state and federal funding to NYSOFA for review and approval. The Older Americans Act provides the AAAs with broad flexibility in planning, designing and implementing services in their service area. Local flexibility is critically important because the needs, and the resources to meet those needs, differ in each community. It is through the local planning process that unique community needs can best be met, rather than a one-size fits all approach mandated by the state. Our agency works in partnership with all 59 AAA's to help fund a variety of important community-based services and support systems development improvements.

NYSOFA's prime responsibility and concern, which we share with the AAAs, is with the quality and access to services to older New Yorkers, and ensuring that those most in need of services are the priority focus – especially those with low-incomes and cultural and ethnic minorities. One of the ways in which NYSOFA meets its responsibility is through review and approval of plans submitted by the AAAs that detail the services to be provided to seniors. Such plans are required by the Older Americans Act.

As you know, the Mayor's Office, DFTA, and the New York City Council recently announced some changes to DFTA's modernization plan. We have been in communication with DFTA about their plans and both agencies have agreed that DFTA will submit an amendment to its annual plan. The amended plan will, pursuant to the requirements of the Older Americans Act:

- Provide NYSOFA with assurances that the AAA will maintain the integrity and public purpose of services provided and service providers under all contractual and commercial relationships in its service area;
- Demonstrate to NYSOFA that a loss or diminution in the quantity or quality of the services provided (or to be provided) by the AAA has not resulted (and will not result) from a contract or contractual relationship;
- Demonstrate to NYSOFA that the quantity or quality of the services to be provided will be enhanced as a result of a contract or a contractual relationship; and,
- Provide NYSOFA, at its request, information regarding all sources and expenditures of funds received by or expended by an AAA to provide services within its service area.
- Demonstrate how the City will assure that the area agency on aging's advisory council, public and other stakeholders has had or will have adequate input on the proposed modernization proposals.

We will work with DFTA to provide any technical assistance in completing such plan amendments and that dialogue has already begun. NYSOFA and DFTA have a long history of working closely in partnership to best serve the elderly and that is the focus and entire context

in which we work. We will continue to work with DFTA over the coming months to ensure that their modernization proposals will meet the standards of the Older Americans Act, standards that NYSOFA is responsible for assuring with the Administration on Aging.

At this important time in history, as we are on the verge of a rapidly growing population of older New Yorkers, we need collaboration and open communication that will build and strengthen alliances across the network and with other groups that share common interests. I believe strongly that the most important thing we need to do is to keep our sights fixed on helping our seniors remain as independent as possible by addressing their critical needs and preferences. Our culture has always been one that focuses on those in need and our principles and values are centered on supporting the individual in the context of the family. We have an opportunity to advance the values and principles of effective community-based long term care for older New Yorkers. The human faces of those we serve and those who we will serve must continue to guide us and move us in a positive direction for a better future.

Thank you.