



Testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee on Human Services

**Delivered in person on February 6, 2018
by Thomas Weber, Director of Case Management**

My name is Thomas Weber, and I am the Director of Case Management at SAGE. Thank you to Chairpersons Young and Weinstein, and members of the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today and allowing me the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of SAGE with respect to the FY 2018-2019 State Budget.

SAGE is the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older adults. Founded in New York City in 1978, SAGE has provided comprehensive social services and programs to LGBT older people for nearly four decades through our five SAGE centers across the City and our network of 28 affiliates in 21 states.

As you know, services for older New Yorkers are crucial – and will become even more important to a growing demographic in our state. Every day in this country, 10,000 people turn 65. According to LiveOn New York, by the year 2030, 20% of New Yorkers will be over the age of 60.

LGBT older adults are a significant part of this rapidly growing elder population. However, they remain largely invisible and at increased risk. They are often severely isolated, disconnected from services and have very thin support networks. In fact, LGBT elders are twice as likely to live alone; half as likely to be partnered; and more than four times less likely to have kids. Many LGBT elders were shunned by their families and, as a result, are half as likely to have close relatives to call for help. Roughly one quarter of LGBT elders have no one to call in case of an emergency.

Because of their thin support networks, LGBT older people are more likely to rely on community service providers, such as SAGE, for care as they age. Yet, they're often distrustful of mainstream providers – and for good reason. LGBT older people are more likely to face discrimination around their sexual orientation and gender identity when accessing health care, social services or other programs. SAGE exists to provide LGBT elders in our state with these comprehensive services through our SAGE Centers and related health, housing and veterans services outlined below.

SAGE Centers:

SAGE offers LGBT older adults and caregivers access to LGBT-affirming support and programming across New York City. Our network of five SAGE Centers across New York City – in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem, Midtown Manhattan and Staten Island – collectively welcome approximately 5,000 LGBT older adults annually for community, support and programming. All sites provide health and wellness programming, socialization, arts and culture and lifelong learning opportunities, as well as congregate meals. In addition, each Center develops services that are unique to the culture of its individual community.

Housing:

Recognizing the acute need for stable, affordable and LGBT-welcoming housing, last June, SAGE and our partners, HELP USA and BFC Partners, announced the development of New York City's first LGBT-welcoming senior housing. Located in Ft. Greene, Brooklyn, Ingersoll Senior Residences, with 145 units, will be the nation's largest LGBT-welcoming elder housing development in the nation. Separately, the 82-unit Crotona Senior Residences, located in Crotona Park North, Bronx, will offer safe, LGBT-welcoming housing to older Bronxites. The marquee of each development will be a full-service, state-of-the-art, ground-floor SAGE Center, built on our successful model.

Veterans Programs:

New York is home to approximately one million men and women who served their country in the Armed Forces – many of whom are LGBT. When ranked by the number and per capita rate of gay and lesbian veterans, both New York State and New York City are among the top ten states and cities with highest concentrations of gay and lesbian vets. According to a recent survey by the LGBT Health and Human Services Network, 76% of people who identified as veterans were from Upstate New York and 56% of LGBT veterans were over the age of 50. Nearly 1/3 of LGBT veterans identified as transgender.

Older LGBT veterans served in the military at a time when discrimination against LGBT people was rampant and a matter of official government policy. As a result, many LGBT elder veterans cannot or have not accessed their federal VA and related benefits. SAGEVets saves New York State and local governments significant amounts of funding by ensuring that veterans access the benefits that they are entitled to.

SAGE created the SAGEVets program, with support from the New York State Assembly, specifically to respond to the swelling need among LGBT vets and to identify, support and provide access to care for LGBT older veterans statewide. Through this program, SAGE provides New York's LGBT elder veterans with LGBT-competent case management support, benefits advocacy, access to legal counsel and enhanced wrap-around services in order to improve their overall well-being. The program also educates veterans groups across the state about the unique challenges of the LGBT veterans, increasing awareness about LGBT veterans.

Of note, the New York State LGBT Health and Human Services Network has found that:

- 43% of lesbian, gay and bisexual vets live at under 200% of the Federal Poverty line; for transgender veterans, this number was nearly 60%
- 30% of LGB veterans were homeless; 46% of transgender vets were homeless
- 30% of LGB veterans and 48% of transgender vets fear discrimination from providers

SAGE has maximized state support to connect LGBT older veterans cross the great Empire State with critical services. SAGEVets has:

- Reached a total of over 4,200 veterans and individuals statewide;
- Presented to over 600 veterans, caregivers and service providers on LGBT and older veteran issues at senior centers, nursing homes, veterans' service agencies, and more; and
- Provided information and referrals to over 275 veterans.

SAGE continues to offer much-needed support our LGBT older vets when they have nowhere else to turn. To that end, we respectfully request that the New York State Legislature continue to provide \$100,000 in support for this important statewide program that connects older LGBT veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice with the support they need and deserve. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. I look forward to answering any questions.