



Making New York a better place to age

**New York State  
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
Human Services  
February 2, 2022**

My name is Brianna Paden-Williams and I am the Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY. Thank you to both the Senate and the Assembly for the opportunity to testify today.

LiveOn NY represents the diverse network of nonprofit organizations that help older New Yorkers to thrive in their communities. Through advocacy, mobilization and coalition building, we advance systemic change to ensure that New York is an equitable and inclusive place to age regardless of wealth, racial disparities and other barriers.

With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations, LiveOn NY's members provide core services throughout New York, including senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, transportation, NORCs, case management, and home care.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the human services sector has stepped up to ensure the most vulnerable New Yorkers including older adults have access to critical services to age in community. For over two years later, providers confronted a pandemic that put older adults at the greatest risk, not only to the virus, but also to the negative health impacts of extended periods of isolation while staying home to avoid infection. In response to these threats, providers worked to change their service models virtually overnight, shifting to reaching clients via phone, setting up zoom classes, enrolling clients in new emergency food systems, navigating new vaccine systems, and continuing to be a resource to older adults throughout New York.

We appreciate the recent aging related commitments by Governor Hochul in the Executive Budget to support the human services sector and older New Yorkers. In particular, we appreciate and encourage inclusion in the Adopted Budget:

- \$500 million to include a 5.4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human services workers,
- \$300 million investment to develop and preserve affordable senior housing for low-income older adults,
- \$500,000 in support of the creation of a Master Plan on Aging, and
- Continued funding, totalling \$23 million, to address unmet need for aging services across the state.

Nonetheless, we also recognize the work still needed to be done to better support older New Yorkers. While the older adult population continues to be the fastest growing demographic,



Making New York a better place to age

making up nearly 16% of the State's population, the programs that support older New Yorkers remain chronically underfunded. Representative of this underfunding, the overall state budget grew by 3.1% in the Executive Budget, while the NYSOFA budget lagged behind overall growth, at 1.8%, despite the population it serves making up a larger and larger share of the overall population.

To begin to address the inequities impacting older adults and providers, the following represents LiveOn NY's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 budget recommendations:

### ***Budget Ask: \$14.1 million to support NYSOFA-funded Home Delivered Meals for older adults***

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated significant increases to the demand for home-delivered meals (HDM), with providers now serving more older adults than ever, with thousands of new clients being added to the service since March. The HDM program offers older adults across the State with a daily nutritious meal, however, COVID-19 has put a strain on HDM providers including difficulty hiring drivers and delivery staff due to low wages, rising costs of raw food, a significant growth in the state's 65+ population, difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers, and high rates of food insecurity.

### ***Budget Ask: \$5 Million to Create a Resident Advisor Program in Affordable Senior Housing***

Deepening investments in affordable senior housing with services is critical in future years, not only to improve the quality of life of older New Yorkers and address rising senior homelessness, but as a cost-savings measure against increased Medicaid and Medicare spending. **A resident advisor program in senior housing residences has proven to reduce health care costs, including reducing Medicaid expenditures.**

A \$5 million investment in FY23, totaling \$25 million over five years, will create a new resident advisor program to ensure older adults can age safely with access to light touch, non-medical services. This investment will inevitably save Medicaid dollars, with one such study, by our member, Selfhelp Community Services, finding the hospitalization rate of those living in a building with service coordination was 43% percent lower than for those living in the surrounding zip code.

### ***Full Funding for Fair Pay for Home Care***

Fair Pay for Home Care, S5374 (May) / A6329 (Gottfried) seeks to "establish a base wage for home care workers at 150% of the regional minimum wage" to create jobs for New Yorkers, support older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers, and rebuild our economy by paying



Making New York a better place to age

home care workers a just wage. Without a mandate and funding from the government, the wage compression will continue to be exacerbated, straining the existing home care system.

This legislation would move New York forward in creating a caring economy, ensuring that older New Yorkers and individuals with disabilities have access to critical services to safely age in community as well as pay workers the fair and equitable wage they deserve.

### **Address Waiting Lists for NYSOFA Services**

Waiting lists for NYSOFA services remain a chronic issue as New York's counties and non-profit providers continue to experience waiting lists for services due to insufficient funding to meet the demand. Given the exorbitant strain COVID-19 has placed on the older adult population, the prospect of adding further stress to the lives of older New Yorkers by forcing them to wait for critical services is untenable and must be addressed through significant and immediate investments. In addition, increased investments in addressing the waiting list for NYSOFA services will inevitably help balance the State's budget by reducing Medicaid expenditures.

### ***Budget Ask: \$20 Million to increase funding for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP)***

The LTCOP is a resource for older adults and persons with disabilities who live in nursing homes, assisted living and other licensed residential facilities. Today ombudspeople help residents understand and exercise their rights to good care in an environment that promotes and protects their dignity and quality of life.

Ombudspeople investigate and resolve complaints; promote the development of resident and family councils; and inform stakeholders about issues and concerns that impact facility residents. The importance of the program was underscored during COVID, unfortunately, as was its underinvestment. The program was hamstrung in its ability to assist older New Yorkers in nursing homes due to lack of investment, and will remain so into the future without an infusion of funds.

### ***Budget Ask: \$350,000 for LiveOn NY's Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) Program***

To ensure that older people can tap into their momentum and age in place, LiveOn NY is requesting **\$350,000** in funding for LiveOn NY's Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) Program. Through RISE, LiveOn NY will train statewide older adult service professionals, as well as work with elected officials and their respective staff to reach and provide critical information and resources to older adults in the five boroughs.



Making New York a better place to age

This statewide initiative will be based on LiveOn NY's successful partnering, outreach and education model that combines public and private partnerships with volunteer and professionally led engagement. This program has three key outcomes:

- Older New Yorkers will be aware of the key laws, policies and resources which are meant to help them age in place, as well as how to get assistance as needed.
- Expansion to provide training and education for the senior service workforce so that they also know about benefits, programs and services, and how to best help their clients, this includes through our "Boots on the Ground" committee meetings.
- Serve as "constituent services" partner with your office to bring needed information to the community (e.g. through information for your newsletters).

LiveOn NY thanks our champions in the legislature for their previous years of support for this program, and requests continued support to allow our team to continue supporting professionals and older New Yorkers through RISE into the future.

### **In Conclusion**

As we look ahead, LiveOn NY is ready to work with the State to continue to move the human services sector forward to ensure all New Yorkers can thrive in community with access to equitable community-based aging services.

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**Testimony provided by Brianna Paden-Williams, Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY**

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*LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.*

*LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.*