



**New York State
Committee on Finance
Ways and Means Committee
Chairs Kreuger and Weinstein
February 13, 2023**

My name is Allison Nickerson and I am the Executive Director of LiveOn NY. Thank you to Finance Committee Chair Kreuger, Ways and Means Chair Weinstein and the members of the Finance and Ways and Means committees for hosting this hearing and for the opportunity to testify today.

LiveOn NY represents the diverse network of nonprofit organizations that help older New Yorkers to thrive in our 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.

Background

Rising costs due to inflation and a lack of recognition of the needs of older adults as they grow into a larger share of the overall population of our state are two factors leading to a lack of resources that has already found over 13,000 people in New York State on waiting lists for basic services. If we do not take the necessary steps to meet the existing needs in our state and cover skyrocketing inflation costs in this budget we will be leaving the older adults in our state behind.

With these needs in mind we must have a forward looking view of how our state views older adults in our policies and budgets. We cannot only be reactionary and call for resources that are already lacking in these services. By 2030, in only 7 years, adults of retirement age will make up 20% of the population of our country. We must make significant structural changes and investments to meet the needs of a future that we are all a part of. We can be a place where we can thrive as we age in our communities, if we are willing to recognize that we are all aging, and these investments are for each and every one of us.

Nonetheless, we recognize that there is a considerable amount of work to be done to better support older New Yorkers' immediate needs. While the older adult population continues to be the fastest growing demographic the number of older adults living in poverty has also surged. As the aging population becomes more diverse they face complex structural inequities related to systemic racism and discrimination against migrant populations that are only compounded by ageism and a lack of adequate funding or policies to meet the needs of our diverse aging population.

According to a recent report by the Center for an Urban Future, Hispanic New Yorkers age 65 and older are experiencing the highest rates of older adult poverty of any population, at 23.5 percent. Asian older

adults have the second-highest poverty rate, at 19.1 percent, followed by African American older adults at 16.6 percent, and white older adults at 8.7 percent.

To begin to address the inequities impacting older adults and providers, LiveOn NY recommends the following in this year's budget:

\$38.6 million to fund NYSOFA's budget line Community Services for the Elderly (CSE)

\$29.1 million to address inflation costs for food, gas, and other commodities: This investment would absorb inflation and increased costs of food, gas, and other commodities. This calculation takes our existing funding and applies an adjustment for current inflation.

\$9.5 million to end the waitlist for community-based services through NYSOFA: New York's counties and non-profit providers continue to experience waiting lists for services due to insufficient funding to meet the demand. After first addressing the wage issues within the sector, outlined in the asks above, the State should then look to allocate funding as needed to address new waiting lists for services.

\$5 Million to Create a Resident Advisor Program in Affordable Senior Housing

A \$5 million investment in FY24, 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 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.

Fully Fund Fair Pay for Home Care

Last session a Fair Pay for Home Care, S5374 (May) / A6329 (Gottfried) was introduced that 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 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.

\$15 Million to increase funding for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP)

LTCOP is a resource for older adults and persons with disabilities who live in nursing homes, assisted living and other licensed residential facilities. 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.

\$2.5 Million to Expand Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

NORCs provide on-site supportive services where older adults live by employing social workers, nurses, and in programming to encourage physical activity and combat social isolation. Improved health outcomes of NORCs include lower occurrences of falls, heart disease and Alzheimer’s disease.

Support LiveOn NY’s Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) Program

Through Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE), LiveOn NY trains older adult service professionals, as well as works with elected officials and their respective staff to reach and provide critical information and resources to older adults. Over the last year, we provided outreach to over 226,000 to help connect people with critical and need services; partnered with State Legislative offices to provide constituent assistance, information for local newsletters and assist with benefits and entitlement screening for older adults; and trained over 2,100 professionals, including technical support for Immigrant Senior Centers, a three-day Conference on Aging and monthly “Boots on the Ground Workgroup” meetings to equip and engage the aging services workforce, so they are prepared to support the growing diverse needs of older New Yorkers.

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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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.



Making New York a better place to age

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.