



**Testimony of Educational Alliance,  
Rich Baum, President and CEO  
to the  
New York City Council Committee on Aging  
Crystal Hudson, Chair  
New York City Preliminary Aging Budget FY26  
March 10, 2025**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the NYC Aging budget. My name is Rich Baum, President and CEO of Educational Alliance, a settlement house with community centers located throughout Lower Manhattan offering individuals and families high-quality, multi-generational programs and services that enhance their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities.

Educational Alliance operates three sites supported by contracts with NYC Aging: Weinberg Older Adult Center (OAC), the Cooperative Village Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) and Sirovich OAC. Together, these sites serve a highly diverse population of close to 4,000 older adults annually.

Today I would like to share my deep concerns about the future of programs for older adults in the face of drastic budget cuts, and to urge you to prioritize funding programs and services that help older adults remain in their communities as they age. Specifically, the City should:

- Reverse over \$100 million in cuts to the overall NYC Aging budget beginning in FY26.
- Increase food budgets at older adults centers with a \$57 million investment to meet inflation demands for congregate meal services.
- Increase funding to hire more case managers to support with caseloads and staffing.
- Create a recurring capital fund of at least \$5 million for program repairs and renovations at older adult centers across the City.
- Maintain City Council discretionary funds
- Invest in a Cost of Living Adjustment for our staff, many of whom serve Older Adults.

Years of underinvestment in older adult services in the City has led us to a tipping point: **New York City now faces the prospect of over \$100 million in cuts** to NYC Aging that threaten to close as many as 60 older adult centers and slash vital services. At a time when people 65 and older make up 1 in 5 New Yorkers – outnumbering residents under 21 – these cuts are clearly short-sighted. In New York City, our older adults are facing increasingly precarious lives. The fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness and hunger are older adults. NYC’s [Aging Homeless Study](#) shows that the number of individuals age 65+ experiencing homelessness increased over 300% from 2004 to 2017. According to

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that study, forecasts suggest that “if nothing is done, by 2030 the homeless population over 65 will triple again.” Considering these deep needs, these cuts are deeply misguided.

**Reverse over \$100 million in cuts to the overall NYC Aging budget beginning in FY26 and reinvest in City services for older adults.** The growing population of residents over 65 in New York City faces increasing challenges due to poverty. Many of our members are low income and rely on meals we provide and support from our social work team to connect to benefits and other resources. In addition, the immigrant older adult community has expanded by 43 percent in the past decade. Many of these individuals benefit from our multilingual social workers who work with them in their preferred language including Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, and Spanish.

In response to the needs of our older members, our centers provide thousands of hours of both case management and programming. Our case workers help clients schedule doctor’s appoints, secure food and housing benefits while our program staff offer numerous opportunities to connect with peers and learn new skills such as tap dancing or Chinese bead work. As the population of aging adults grows in the City, we need New York City to be a strong partner with us in the services we provide.

**Increase food budgets at older adult centers with a \$57 million investment to meet inflation and increased demand for congregate meal services.** Our community members rely on us for food. For many, the meals they receive through us are their sustaining nutrition for the day. Some tell us that they would not eat without the meals offered in our centers. But it is increasingly difficult to provide high quality, nutritious meals, not only because of drastic increases in food prices over the past five years but also due to increased demand. We are projected to serve more meals this year than we are contracted to serve. For example, *our Weinberg OAC is contracted to serve 1,200 unique clients in a year – a target we surpassed in six months.* This requires us to pay for the difference, which is unsustainable.

Additionally, we know that more is needed. Increasingly, we have to turn people away from meal service due to high demand. Our food pantry appointments fill up within a day of release. It is clear that we could serve many more than we do, with additional resources. We urge the City to include \$57 million to meet the growing demand for our meal services, and the rising cost of food.

**Increase funding to hire more case managers to support with caseloads and staffing.** Social workers and case workers help older adults access benefits, social services, and more. However, with more older adults needing support, caseloads have become unsustainable. At Educational Alliance, our social services staff have an average caseload of 50 individuals. The NORC, specifically, has a waiting list for high-need cases such as those who are homebound and have complex health and mental health needs and limited support from family. Because we serve a highly diverse population across our sites, we need social services staff who are fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, and Spanish. *Given the need*

**for services, we are projected to go over our contracted units by over 30 percent.** To help us better accommodate the increased demand for these services, the City should increase funding to allow us to hire additional social workers and case workers so we can expand case management support and ensure older adults receive the quality, comprehensive support they need.

**Create a recurring capital fund of at least \$5 million for program repairs and renovations.**

Organizations cannot continue to provide services without resources needed to keep our buildings in good repair. For example, our Sirovich center operates out of a city-owned building that needs significant upgrades to the HVAC system, windows, plumbing, floors, and ceilings. Repairs would allow us to correct building conditions that have resulted in citations given to us by NYC Aging during audits. The estimated cost for such repairs is at least \$100,000.

**Maintain Council Aging Initiative Funding.** City Council discretionary funding for aging services is foundational to the work we do. EA's staff and members are grateful for your support, which sustains our programs' operation. Funds allocated to our OACs help us cover expenses not funded by our NYC Aging contracts including \$30,000 worth of food; \$36,200 in salaries for kitchen and program personnel; \$14,000 worth of program and building supplies; and \$3,000 for meaningful trip experiences for our members.

**Finally, we urge the City Council to increase funding for higher wages for aging services professionals.**

Our meal programs and many other services are serving higher numbers of people than ever due to increased demand. And yet, we experience chronic understaffing due to wages set by our contracts. Moreover, nonprofit human services contractors are unfairly underpaid when compared with similar titles in the public sector. We urge the City to increase compensation for human service professionals.

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We have collected testimony from hundreds of our members, attached here, urging City leaders to reconsider any cuts to older adult services. Here is a sample of what our members are saying:

*"Decreasing or cutting funds for senior centers will definitely be cutting from seniors who are unable to do all the shopping and preparing their meals at home. This program supports our physical, emotional, mental and social relationships that enhance and enrich our life experience in a place that is welcoming with staff and administration who are caring, helpful and listen to suggestions that senior members in their various roles."*

*"I depend on the center for the hot meals that Sirovich provides. The companionship of people coming together ensures mental health and less depression. Exercise classes and education programs are important for health throughout our lives and very important as people age."*

*"Senior citizens aim to lead a vibrant life and many do. I think of my senior center as college for the older community. There are so many classes from drama, writing, dancing, chair yoga, tai chi, painting, ceramics. These are our growing opportunities which are not panned in by age. Humans have capacity to learn until the end."*

*"I would be totally isolated and would feel terrible loss if these services would be cut"*

None of us wants to be forgotten when we grow old. The Book of Psalms includes this foundational fear: Cast me not aside when I grow old; as my strength fails do not forsake me. I would suggest that many older New Yorkers do indeed feel forsaken. I ask that the leaders of the city consider the needs of our elders and take action so they are not cast aside. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.