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NEW YORK DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING  
OCTOBER 21, 2010  
TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY  
COUNCIL MEMBER GALE A. BREWER, COUNCIL DISTRICT 6  
ON THE DFTA ANNUAL PLAN SUMMARY 2010-2011

I am Gale A. Brewer and I represent residents of the Upper West Side and Clinton neighborhoods in the City Council. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the plan submitted by the Department for the Aging for the next fiscal year.

First, I would like to applaud Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli for her leadership at DFTA. Despite difficult cuts in funding this year, DFTA remains an international and national leader in creating policies to benefit older adults. In particular, DFTA is integrating services across all city departments. In addition to working through DFTA, the Area Agency on Aging traditionally responsible for all aging activities, through the Age-Friendly NYC Initiative, DFTA is collaborating with the Parks Department, the NYPD, the Finance Department, NYCHA, the Department of Transportation, and others to improve the lives of older adults.

This inter-agency approach leads to the changes that older adults tell us over and over that they would like to see - improved streets, better park access, new housing policies, etc. DFTA has also created public-private partnerships with businesses, schools, and non-profit organizations; this creative work should continue and be built upon. It expands DFTA's reach, affects the lives of more older adults, and provides a model for other municipalities and federal policy.

In this same vein, I recommend that DFTA continue to expand its service potential by having its services providers connect to and better utilize local community resources. Senior centers should be connecting to neighborhood businesses, cultural centers, colleges, and parks facilities to expand program offerings, accommodate diverse populations, and serve more people. These local resources could be especially effective in combating social isolation, mental health issues, and the great technological divide between older adults and younger generations— all concerns outlined in DFTA's annual plan.

Furthermore, given the current economic crisis and pervasive poverty among older adults, DFTA must improve its screening of older adults to identify benefit eligibility, especially for individuals already in the DFTA system. There are at least 2,000 older adults living in poverty in every community district, and many are receiving less assistance than they are eligible for because they are unaware of it or do not know how to enroll.

Another concern with the proposed Annual Plan is changes in Case Management. For example, the very special One Stop Senior Center, located at 96<sup>th</sup> Street and Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan, does not have a DFTA funded case management consultant; they fundraise privately for this staff member. Per the last RFP, DFTA funded consultants were supposed to be assigned between 90 to 110 cases/person; these agencies are currently handling an estimated 70-80 (at One Stop the case load is approx 45).

Not only are these centers understaffed, but they are staffed by workers with only a BSW. By not using workers with an MSW, DFTA saves money, but it also relies on workers with less experience. With more people needing services due to aging—out and economic stress, DFTA needs workers like those at One Stop who are highly experienced at identifying needs and resources. With a 40% cut to DFTA's budget, and rumors of more cuts to come in January, 2011, it appears inevitable that seniors will fall through the cracks.

On a related matter, many senior programs report that their only source of continuous and reliable funding is the City Council; what is the Administration's plan to fund senior services on an on-going basis? Without the capacity to plan and budget well in advance of identified needs, service delivery falls short, and seniors suffer.

SAGE, an organization that I have great respect for, lauds the Plan because it recognizes additional health risks and barriers for LGBT older

adults. SAGE also recognizes that additional support is needed. SAGE continues to provide education, training, and support in various aging settings (senior centers, home care workers, retirement communities, etc), especially where unique cultural skills are needed. SAGE also needs funding to continue this outreach, as LGBT seniors are not always made to feel comfortable in centers where training is lacking.

Finally, I want to congratulate DFTA on their successful Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) collaboration in winning a federal stimulus grant of more than \$2 million to provide broadband technology programs and equipment for seniors over the next three years. The application to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) was spearheaded by the City's Department of Information, Technology and Telecommunications and will involve outfitting community-based computer labs with new equipment, teaching a large volume of OATS classes, expanding the Senior Planet Digital Community, and launching a new "Center for Technology Exploration, Training, and Support" for New York's older adults. As you know, I am a long time supporter of OATS, and I am delighted that this grant was awarded. I hope that the effort will improve communication to seniors, and to the great staff working within this community.

In summary, I always enjoy working with DFTA, particularly with the current leadership. I am also pleased to be representing one of two communities designated Age Friendly. We are working with the Academy of Medicine to make the project successful. The challenge for all of us is to obtain more funding for DFTA and the services that the Agency provides.