

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA'S EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
DAVID PRISTIN  
SENIOR SERVICES AND CENTERS IN NYCHA  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON AGING  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2018 – 10:00 AM  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL, NEW YORK, NY**

Chairs Alicka Ampry-Samuel and Margaret Chin, members of the Committees on Public Housing and Aging, and other distinguished members of the City Council: good morning. I am David Pristin, NYCHA's Executive Vice President for External Affairs. Joining me today are Deborah Goddard, Executive Vice President for Capital Projects; Ukah Busgith, Senior Director of the Family Partnerships Department; Carolyn Jasper, Vice President for Operations; as well as our partners from the City's Department for the Aging (DFTA).

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Authority's work to provide the more than 80,000 seniors living in our developments across the city with safe, supportive communities and access to quality services. We provided testimony on this topic to the Council in October 2017 and are happy to provide you with an update today on senior services and centers at NYCHA.

While NYCHA faces significant challenges – a loss of \$3 billion in federal operating and capital funding over the last 17 years and a \$32 billion capital need – we are firmly committed to our seniors and believe that all New Yorkers deserve to age in place with dignity in their homes. In recent years, we have reconsidered how we work, focusing on our core responsibility to be a better landlord. This has led to creative, new approaches to serving residents – particularly our seniors who are aging in place. As part of that focus, we've moved away from directly providing social services to connecting residents to best-in-class services from the vast network of social service providers throughout the city.

## **A Supportive Environment for Seniors**

NYCHA helps our seniors thrive in a number of ways, with initiatives that positively impact seniors living in our developments as well as programs that serve only our most vulnerable. If you're a senior at NYCHA, you can benefit from physical improvements to our buildings, access to on-site and nearby services, connections to services, and age-friendly reasonable accommodation policies.

### *Building Improvements*

As a landlord, NYCHA continues to focus on improving our buildings to enhance residents' quality of life. As mentioned last year, we updated the architectural design guidelines for the rehabilitation of our buildings, taking into account age-friendly and accessible designs, as well as DFTA's *Age-Friendly NYC* report and HPD's guidelines for senior housing. Whenever the funding is available to upgrade our buildings, these standards will better support the safety, health, and comfort of residents, including their ability to age in place gracefully.

Guided by the new architectural standards, in 2017 and 2018 we invested over \$8 million to make accessibility and age-friendly improvements at 66 developments, such as more comfortable seating areas on the grounds for seniors. The new LED exterior lighting that we're installing across the city makes it easier for everyone, including our seniors, to see. We are eager to get the funding necessary to complete more of these projects in the future.

### *NYCHA Senior Centers*

The 110 senior centers at NYCHA, including the 96 senior centers and senior social clubs sponsored by DFTA, provide a range of recreational, health, and cultural activities, services, and resources that enhance the lives of NYCHA residents and other seniors in the community. On any given day, seniors participate in free exercise classes, discussion groups, or blood pressure

screenings. At DFTA-funded senior centers, older New Yorkers can get free meals, counseling on social services, or assistance with benefits. Regardless of where they live, most NYCHA seniors have access to a program on-site or within their community.

The 14 senior centers that are not run by DFTA are still operated by NYCHA through funding from the Mayor's Office. The funding we have received, \$3 million a year, allows us to fully or partially operate senior center programming and meal services. Since 2015, attendance has increased by 42 percent at these centers. This demonstrates how important they are for our aging population.

While we are committed to our senior centers, NYCHA's capital needs total \$32 billion, including the significant repair needs at our senior centers. Discussions with our partners at OMB and DFTA about how best to improve our centers are ongoing. We will continue to work with them to lay out clear roles and responsibilities for each party and determine the best strategy for financing existing repair needs within the context of NYCHA's larger capital need. These centers are valuable assets to our communities that deserve to be preserved. But given NYCHA's dire financial position and more than \$30 billion in capital needs, it is difficult to accommodate both the repairs needed to secure our residents' homes as well as the fixes for our centers.

We are in discussions with our partners at OMB and DFTA on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to improve how we repair our centers. This MOU, once finalized, will lay out clear roles and responsibilities for each party, making senior center management more straightforward. Although this MOU was expected to be completed earlier this year, thoughtful discussions are ongoing.

### *Services and Programs for Seniors*

NYCHA's Community Engagement and Partnerships department fulfills NYCHA's goal of engaging residents and connecting them to best-in-class

services. By engaging key populations, including seniors, and connecting them to critical health and social services from community-based organizations and other City agencies, seniors are supported as they age in place at NYCHA. We know we cannot do this alone – which is why we streamlined how we partner with local providers, through our “Zone Model.”

Partnership is key to serving our seniors. NYCHA works with dedicated providers across the city to meet their needs. Here are some examples of the services our partners provide:

- The HUD-funded **Senior Resident Advisor Program** provides on-site assistance to seniors in need at six sites, helping them live safely and independently in their homes through home visits, connections to services, and regular visits by volunteer “floor captain” neighbors.
- Another HUD-funded initiative, the **Elderly Safe-At-Home** program, provides crime prevention and social service assistance and educational workshops to seniors at four sites in the South Bronx.
- Socially isolated or homebound seniors in all five boroughs receive regular home visits through Henry Street Settlement’s **Senior Companion Program**. Senior Companions are healthy, older adults who help their fellow seniors live independently, by helping them go shopping and go to doctors’ appointments, do errands, and by simply providing companionship.

Currently, our partners Presbyterian Senior Services, Hudson Guild, Union Settlement, and Project FIND are serving residents at specific developments in their service areas. NYCHA is finalizing partnerships with 16 additional providers that will also assist seniors directly. And 11 partners will be located at NYCHA’s Family Partnership Department offices to provide helpful services to seniors.

At our 74 seniors-only buildings and 11 NORCs (retirement communities that are naturally occurring), seniors and their caregivers are supported with on-site and

nearby assistance. This includes one-on-one counseling as well as recreational and cultural opportunities from DFTA and many other providers. At 9 NORC sites, homebound and non-homebound seniors are connected to services and get help with accessing public benefits and improving their health. NYCHA is applying for six more NYCHA buildings to be designated as NORCs, and we expect to hear back about their eligibility next year.

And just this last Friday, we activated 82 new Senior Champions across our developments. These NYCHA leaders participated in workshops on creating health, safety, and educational activities for seniors in NYCHA communities. We appreciate Council Member Diana Ayala's participation in this valuable initiative.

## **Conclusion**

NYCHA provides vital support to seniors in many ways – from senior center programming to the dedicated services available at our seniors-only buildings; from the new housing we're creating exclusively for seniors to our reasonable accommodation policies that facilitate assistance from caregivers. We are eager to continue engaging with the Council and our other partners across the city as we work to transform NYCHA and enhance the level of services offered to our seniors.

Thank you for the opportunity to continue the dialogue on this important topic. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.