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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services  
New York City Council  
FY19 Senior Center Model Budget Public Testimony  
June 21, 2018**

My name is Katie Foley and I am the Director of Public Affairs at Selfhelp Community Services.

Thank you to Aging Committee Chair Margaret Chin and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today on the Model Budget process for senior centers.

Selfhelp was founded in 1936 to help those fleeing Nazi Germany maintain their independence and dignity as they struggled to forge new lives in America. Today, Selfhelp has grown into one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area, with 26 sites throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. We provides a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year, while remaining the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America. Selfhelp offers a complete network of community-based home care, social service, and senior housing programs with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; ten affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three intensive case management programs; five senior centers including one of New York City's first Innovative Senior Centers; home health care; client centered technology programs including the Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and New York Connects, which provides seniors and people with disabilities with the information and support they need to remain living independently in their own homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the City's model budget process for DFTA contracted senior centers. Four of Selfhelp's five senior centers were included in this process and our remarks will focused on our experiences with those four contracts.

**Model Budget**

We commend the Department for the Aging (DFTA), Office of Management and Budget, and the City Council for the ongoing commitment to senior centers since the beginning of the model budget process. This significant funding for the City's senior centers has been, and will continue to be, a critical step



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towards stabilizing one of the core programs that supports older New Yorkers, including many immigrant seniors.

Overall, our experience with the model budget process has been positive. The additional funding allowed for numerous upgrades to Selfhelp's senior centers. First, the investment enabled us to raise salaries for program staff, which was much needed and much appreciated. The investment in the model budget for staff helps address ongoing concerns related to salary parity that has been a concern for Selfhelp and many other providers and advocates since the case management salaries were raised. We have now seen the impact of increased salaries in the aging network, and are grateful for this important step. Second, the additional funding allows us to expand programming options. Third, the flexibility provided in FY18 budget offered the opportunity to upgrade the centers through one-time purchases, such as repairing the entryway at one center and purchasing computers, and large kitchen equipment for others. We are finding that some spending, especially related to building repairs, is difficult to achieve in the short timeframe since we received the funds. We are optimistic that DFTA's flexibility will extend to allowing some of the projects approved for FY18 to be completed within FY19. Our relationship with DFTA is stronger because of our work together in implementing the model budget process, and we would like to thank them for a collaborative relationship.

In addition to the successes of the model budget process, we want to share some of the challenges we've faced with the Council. We remain concerned that other costs beyond programming and related salaries were not included in the model budget process, in particular for food and kitchen staff, both of which are significant costs for senior centers. We hope that the allocations in the subsequent years will focus on food, rent, OTPS, and other associated costs. Selfhelp supports the request for \$12.1 million for congregate and home delivered meals to be baselined to increase the reimbursement rates. We also appreciate the \$2.8 million in onetime funding for home delivered meals and hope to see continued investment in food and meals. This funding is particularly important to increase the reimbursement rate for culturally-competent meals, such as kosher or halal, both of which currently result in a deficit to nonprofits upon each meal provided, despite cultural competency being a requirement of DFTA. Given our interactions to date, we believe that DFTA will continue to engage with providers on necessary budget modifications considering the dynamic needs of each center.

Selfhelp is requesting that the remaining \$10 million that has been committed to this process be allocated by FY20, instead of FY21. Expediting the \$10 million in funding by FY20 as opposed to the proposed 3-year rollout will have a very positive impact on the operations of our programs. Allocating these funds is especially important with the projected next RFP for senior centers to be released in calendar year 2020.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the 20,000 clients we serve, I am grateful for the Council's support on so many important programs.

