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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services, Inc.
New York City Council Aging Committee
FY20 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 12, 2019**

My name is Katie Foley and I am the Director of Public Affairs at Selfhelp Community Services. Thank you to Finance Committee Chair Daniel Dromm, Aging Committee Chair Margaret Chin, and the members of both committees for the opportunity to testify today on the FY20 Preliminary Budget.

Selfhelp provides a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers, 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.

We are grateful for the Council's ongoing support for so many important senior programs and for emphasizing the needs of older adults in policy decisions and budget allocations.

Today I will focus on a few of Selfhelp's priorities that we hope that Council will highlight over the next few months and in budget negotiations.

Senior Center Model Budget

We commend the DFTA, the Office of Management and Budget, and the City Council for the ongoing commitment to senior centers since the beginning of the model budget process.

Selfhelp is requesting that the remaining \$10 million that has been committed to the model budget process be allocated this year, instead of FY21. Allocating the remaining funding will have a very positive impact on the operations of our programs, and is critical before the next RFP for senior centers to be released in calendar year 2020.

We remain concerned that other costs beyond salaries were not included in the model budget process, in particular for food, which is a significant cost for senior centers. We hope that the allocations in the subsequent years will focus on food, rent, OTPS, and other associated costs.

We request \$20 million in additional funding to increase funding for the reimbursement rate for meals (which is currently 20% below the national average), adequately fund staffing, and address the unfunded costs of running senior center kitchens so that seniors can eat nutritious, culturally

competent meals. This funding is particularly important for culturally-competent meals, such as the kosher meals provided at our Austin Street Senior Center in Forest Hills.

Resident Advisor Service Coordinator

We urge the City Council to advocate for the creation of a senior housing resident coordinator program, which invests \$5 million in social workers within new and existing senior affordable housing. Resident assistance includes an array of “light-touch” services that promote healthy living by extending independence and improving quality of life.

Recently published research proves that Selfhelp’s housing-plus-services model has a significant impact on health and reduces healthcare costs. This model results in a savings to the Medicaid program by keeping low-income seniors out of more costly levels of care such as assisted living or nursing homes.

Holocaust Survivor Initiative:

For the past few years, the City Council, with the leadership and advocacy of Council Member Espinal, along with the Jewish Caucus started and expanded the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative.

This year, we are urging the City Council to renew this initiative, with continued support for Selfhelp and our Holocaust Survivor Program. Approximately 50% of the survivors served by Selfhelp are living at or below the poverty line, while 80% of survivors from the former Soviet Union are living in poverty. As the largest provider of comprehensive services to survivors, Selfhelp is uniquely positioned to assist this last generation of survivors, especially as their needs grow more intense and more costly.

Virtual Senior Center

Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center has been proven to effectively and profoundly impact social isolation. As DFTA has noted, loneliness and social isolation are associated with increased mortality among older adults. The program has been shown to break down barriers of digital literacy, reduce social isolation and improve participants’ quality of life.

The VSC has been able to expand due to the support of members of the City Council. We strongly encourage DFTA and City Council to consider creating new investments in technology services, such as the Virtual Senior Center, that can help reduce social isolation amongst homebound older adults.

Senior Transportation Program

With support from Council Member Paul Vallone and the Queens Delegation, Selfhelp has been operating a senior transportation program to provide free transportation to and from medical appointments. Due to the success of the program and high demand from individuals, we are seeking to continue this program across Queens to continue to serve the seniors that in need.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

Selfhelp provides social services to more than 1,300 residents at four Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs throughout Queens. We are very appreciative of

the consistent support the NORC program has received in the City Council. Because of your enthusiasm for this program, we have been able to bring resources and attention to the needs of a large and rapidly growing senior population.

A key component NORCs is health care management and assistance. Many residents rely on these services as a main source of health care and value the consistent, quality care they provide.

We ask that the Council restore this \$3.65 million, and that the Administration restore the \$1 million it previously supported. This funding is vital to ensure that current programs can continue to provide services.

Finally, we ask that the Council work with the Administration to ensure salary parity for NORC staff. While there have been salary increases for case managers and senior center staff over the past few years, NORC salaries remain underfunded. It is difficult to recruit and retain highly trained staff without salary parity across all DFTA-funded programs.

Discretionary Funding For Core Senior Services

Selfhelp supports the priorities of our partner organizations, including continued investment in all the Council initiatives that support aging programs, found in Schedule C. A few examples include:

- Support our Seniors provides diverse services across the City
- SU-CASA programs are creative aging art programs at senior centers
- Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations support New York City's diverse older adults with culturally competent services
- Healthy Aging Initiative provides support for various health-promotion programs
- Social Adult Day offers additional support for seniors with high levels of need, including for Selfhelp's Alzheimer's Resource Program

We appreciate the City Council for consistent support of these program and all senior services.

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.