

Testimony of Selfhelp Community Services

Joint Legislative Budget Hearings Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Executive Budget Proposal Health and Human Services

Submitted by Karen Taylor
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact of health and human service programs in New York State, particularly those that support older adults in their communities. My name is Karen Taylor, Program Director for the Selfhelp Community Services Neighborhood NORC Program in Jackson Heights (known as the Northridge/Brulene/Southridge NORC Program). Selfhelp Community Services is a non-profit serving 25,000 older and vulnerable adults each year through home health care, affordable housing, and skilled social services while remaining the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America. I want to thank the Legislature for past investments in services for older adults. Selfhelp's overarching goal is helping older adults live with dignity and independence in their own communities.

As the Director of a large Neighborhood NORC (NNORC) in Queens, I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony today. Selfhelp has four NORC programs, all in Queens, serving about 1,400 people.

Selfhelp supports adding \$2.5 million in new funding for the N/NORC program, including \$1 million to support health and nursing services in N/NORCs and \$1.5 million to grow the N/NORC program to new sites across the State.

First, I would like to thank the Legislature for your ongoing support for N/NORCs. 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 older adult population.

N/NORCs were founded with the ultimate goal of transforming residential complexes and neighborhoods to meet the needs of a growing cohort of older residents and enable them to remain living independently in their homes; thrive in their communities, and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement. The density of older adults and their proximity to each other further fosters creative approaches to providing health and social services. I see this benefit every day at the Jackson Heights NNORC.

We provide case management services; health and nursing services; recreational, social and cultural activities and ancillary services tailored to meet the needs of each community. Our programs actively encourage healthy aging by providing access to health care, promoting health and wellness activities, addressing disease prevention and responding to chronic health conditions.

The Selfhelp Northridge/Brulene/Southridge NNORC program serves 700 residents living in the 8 co-ops that comprise this neighborhood NORC. In 2023, with NYSOFA funding, we provided:

- 884 units of Case Assistance
- 509 hours of case management
- 102 units of Health Assistance
- 161 hours of health care management

Our services have a direct and positive impact on the health of the older adult residents.

A key component of the N/NORC program model is health care management and assistance, and most programs employ nurses to fulfill this requirement. Nurses provide services to N/NORC residents that might not otherwise exist in the community, such as medication education, diabetes testing, flu shots, mobility and balance screenings, and helping clients get in touch with doctors.

Many of the older adults at the Selfhelp NORCs rely on these services as a main source of health care and value the consistent, quality care they provide. With the support of a NYSOFA-funded nurse, we also provided 350 health screenings, and 52 clients attended weekly Healthy Eating/Cooking classes offered by a NYSOFA-funded nutritionist. And with these NYSOFA-funded health care professionals, we were successful in getting 70 NORC members to attend health screenings and on-site flu shot/COVID vaccination events. Further, our health care professionals encourage clients to talk with their doctors, and then provide follow-up so NORC members feel supported in their efforts to maintain their health and well-being. Our NYSOFA-funded nurse also supervises nursing students that come to us from the CUNY School of Professional Studies. The school appreciates knowing that their students will be working with an RN, and has prioritized our site as a result of this important asset.

N/NORC programs produce an incredible benefit for the community on relatively small budgets. For example, the average annual cost of a nursing home stay for one individual in New York State can be as high as \$142,000 per year¹; this amounts to nearly the value of an entire N/NORC program contract, generally serving hundreds of older adults and helping them remain in their homes. If the N/NORC were not there, that person might require nursing home placement or increased visits to the emergency room, adding even more costs. Nursing homes can often be prohibitively expensive, as few individuals can afford to pay out of pocket for care. As a result, nursing home residents become reliant on State and Federal support and subsidies such as Medicaid. Investing in N/NORCs can help limit these increased costs to the Medicaid system.

N/NORCs were previously able to secure nursing hours pro-bono by partnering with hospitals, retired nurses, or supervised student nurses. However, in the wake of recent changes to the health care field, in addition to an aging population with increased needs, these arrangements are now unstable, and many nursing services providers have cut their pro-bono hours. With many of these partnerships greatly diminished or fully

¹ https://www.dfs.ny.gov/consumer/ltc/ltc_about_cost.htm

terminated, N/NORCs must find funding to pay for hours that were previously free, essentially spending more to maintain the same level of service.

A survey of N/NORCs statewide found that on average programs have experienced a 50% reduction in pro-bono nursing hours from 2015-2018. In addition, the largest provider of N/NORC nursing completely eliminated their pro-bono hours in 2019. An additional \$1 million would sufficiently cover these losses across all SOFA-funded N/NORC programs.

The Executive Budget Proposal includes \$8.06 million for N/NORC programs. This funding is vital to ensure that State funded N/NORCs can continue to provide services.

For the last five budget cycles the Legislature has provided additional funding specifically to support nursing services in N/NORCs. This supplemental nursing funding was first added by the Legislature at \$325,000 in FY 2019-2020 and was increased to \$1,000,000 in FY 2021-2022 where it remains today and representing close to the full need. Each N/NORC receives \$23,256 from this funding, and crucially it is not subject to unit of service increases. **We strongly urge the Legislature to restore this \$1 million for N/NORC nursing this year.** This will provide stable funding for N/NORC programs like ours that have struggled with the loss in pro-bono nursing services over the last several years.

In addition, there is high demand for the State to increase the number of N/NORCs to help older adults continue living in their homes and communities. The N/NORC program last underwent an expansion in 2019, adding 14 new programs into NYSOFA's portfolio of 43 total N/NORCs. At that time there were more applicants to the program than the State could afford to fund. With a modest \$1.5 million investment, NYSOFA will be able to create between six to eight new N/NORC programs across the State, which will serve hundreds if not thousands of older adults. Notably, in 2023 the Governor signed S.3392 (May)/A.5915 (Kim), which updates the NORC statute to increase flexibility on building height restrictions that limited eligibility for the program in the past. **We urge the Legislature to fund this expansion with an additional \$1.5 million.**

Older adults across New York State rely on N/NORC services to remain healthy and stably housed, while defraying millions in Medicaid costs to the State. Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of more than 25,000 clients served by Selfhelp, thank you for the opportunity to share our testimony.

About Selfhelp Community Services

With over 25,000 clients each year, Selfhelp enables New Yorkers to age with independence and dignity. Our services include specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; 17 affordable senior housing buildings; 4 NORC programs; 3 intensive case management programs; 5 Older Adult Centers; home health care; the Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; Adult Protective Services, the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP) Social Adult Day Program; and New York Connects in Queens. www.selfhelp.net