

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING
PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2009-2010 ANNUAL PLAN
TESTIMONY OF BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT
MARTY MARKOWITZ**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2008

GOOD MORNING, COMMISSIONER MENDEZ-SANTIAGO AND THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONERS WHO ARE JOINING ME HERE TODAY. WELCOME TO BROOKLYN AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR WORK ON BEHALF OF OLDER ADULTS IN BROOKLYN AND NEW YORK CITY.

FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS A BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RIGHT TO DECIDE WHERE DISCRETIONARY FUNDING GOES. BOROUGH PRESIDENTS, AS MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE, USED TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO APPROPRIATE FUNDING TO THE NON-PROFITS THAT THEY FELT BEST ADDRESSED AGING CONCERNS IN THEIR BOROUGH. IN THE LATE 1980s, MOST BOROUGH PRESIDENTS DECIDED TO STREAMLINE THE PROCESS BY MOVING THIS POOL OF FUNDING TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT DFTA WILL APPROPRIATE FUNDING TO ORGANIZATIONS ACCORDING TO A BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S CHOOSING. THIS WAS COMMON SENSE — BECAUSE WHO KNOWS THE NEEDS OF A BOROUGH BETTER THAN THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT?

EVEN AFTER THE BOARD OF ESTIMATES WAS ABOLISHED IN THE '90S, THIS AGREEMENT CONTINUED. UNTIL THIS YEAR — WHEN DFTA AND DEPUTY MAYOR LINDA GIBBS DECIDED THAT BOROUGH PRESIDENTS ARE NOT ENTITLED TO DECIDE WHICH SENIOR ORGANIZATIONS GET FUNDING.

THIS IS AN UNACCEPTABLE DEVELOPMENT. BOROUGH PRESIDENTS KNOW THE INS AND OUTS OF EACH ORGANIZATION THAT RECEIVES FUNDS, AND UNDERSTAND HOW THE SERVICES THESE ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE IMPACT THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE. THESE ORGANIZATIONS ARE BEDROCKS OF THE COMMUNITY, AND THE SMALLEST CHANGE IN FUNDING MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE. FUNDING FOR SENIOR ORGANIZATIONS HAS BEEN DWINDLING FOR YEARS , EVEN AS THE NEED FOR THESE SAME SERVICES HAS INCREASED.

WHEN IT COMES TO SENIORS, EVERY BOROUGH HAS DIFFERENT NEEDS. THERE IS NO WAY YOU CAN TELL ME SENIOR SERVICES IN BROOKLYN ARE THE SAME AS SERVICES IN ANY OTHER BOROUGH — BECAUSE PROGRAMS ARE DESIGNED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DIFFERENT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NEEDS. THEREFORE, DISCRETIONARY FUNDING RIGHTS SHOULD STAY WITH THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT OFFICE.

I ALSO AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT OTHER CRITICAL ISSUES FACING OLDER BROOKLYNITES DURING DFTA'S SENIOR SERVICE

MODERNIZATION EFFORTS. BROOKLYN HAS THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF SENIORS IN NEW YORK CITY. ACCORDING TO THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE'S AGE-FRIENDLY FINDINGS REPORT, THIS POPULATION WILL GROW SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE NEXT DECADE. OVERALL, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE OVER 60 IN NEW YORK CITY INCREASED FROM 1.25 MILLION IN 2000 TO 1.35 MILLION IN 2006. THAT POPULATION IS PROJECTED TO GROW TO 1.84 MILLION BY 2030, A 47 PERCENT INCREASE FROM THE 2000 FIGURE.

AS OUR RESIDENTS GROW OLDER, MANY OF THEM ARE CHOOSING TO STAY IN BROOKLYN, BECAUSE AS WE ALL KNOW, THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE TO SPEND YOUR SUNSET YEARS. BUT THERE ARE MANY CHALLENGING ISSUES THAT WE NEED TO ADDRESS, SO THAT OUR OLDER RESIDENTS CAN LIVE WITH DIGNITY IN THEIR TWILIGHT YEARS.

SENIORS ARE DEEPLY AFFECTED BY CURRENT MODIFICATIONS TO SENIOR PROGRAMS. SOME ARE ON WAITING LISTS FOR THE MEALS-ON-WHEELS PROGRAM AT CENTERS THAT NEVER HAD A WAIT LIST BEFORE. THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE. FRAIL AND DISABLED SENIORS ARE DEPENDANT ON THESE MEALS. SOME DON'T HAVE A CAREGIVER TO COOK FOR THEM; KNOWING THAT THEY CAN DEPEND ON MEALS BEING DELIVERED TO THEM GIVES THEM PEACE OF MIND. IT IS A SHAME THAT ANY OF THEM HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT RECEIVING THE MEALS THEY NEED.

OTHER SENIORS ARE DEEPLY AFFECTED BY THE CONSOLIDATION OF CASE MANAGEMENT CONTRACTS. IN LAST YEAR'S TESTIMONY, I ADDRESSED MY CONCERN OVER DEPUTY MAYOR GIBBS' POLICY OF COLLAPSING THE 12 BROOKLYN CONTRACTS INTO 7 BECAUSE THE SERVICE AREAS ARE TOO BIG AND SOME SENIORS MAY FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS. AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT HAS HAPPENED. RECENTLY, 3,500 HOMEBOUND SENIORS CITY-WIDE WERE UNDERCOUNTED.

SINCE THE CONSOLIDATION OF CONTRACTS, CASE MANAGEMENT AGENCIES ARE SEEING RATIOS LIKE 130 SENIOR CASES FOR ONE CASE WORKER. A NORMAL CASE LOAD RATIO DURING THE PATAKI ADMINISTRATION WAS 65 SENIORS TO ONE CASE WORKER. UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS, CASE WORKERS CANNOT POSSIBLY GIVE SENIORS THE INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION AND CARE THEY NEED. IT'S THAT SIMPLE.

IN MY TESTIMONY LAST YEAR, I ASKED DFTA TO DO A RIGOROUS EVALUATION OF THE NEW CASE-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM. SPECIFICALLY, I ASKED THAT THE EVALUATORS TRACK THE CLIENTS THAT ARE CURRENTLY BEING SERVED TO SEE HOW MANY HAVE DISRUPTIONS IN SERVICE, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION BEING PAID TO SENIORS IN POVERTY, MEMBERS OF MINORITY GROUPS, AND IMMIGRANTS. I'D LIKE TO KNOW IF DFTA HAS DONE THIS.

WE KNOW THE NUMBER OF SENIORS IN BROOKLYN IS INCREASING, SO HOW WILL THESE SAME CASE MANAGEMENT

AGENCIES, WHICH ARE ALREADY OVERWHELMED, BE ABLE TO KEEP UP?

DFTA ALSO PROMISED THESE CASE-MANAGEMENT AGENCIES ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO HIRE MORE CASE WORKERS TO ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM, BUT WE ARE NOW BEING TOLD THERE IS NO MONEY. I URGE THE COMMISSIONER TO FIND A WAY TO HELP THESE CASE MANAGEMENT AGENCIES. SENIORS DESERVE TO GET THE SERVICES THEY NEED IN A TIMELY MANNER.

SENIOR CENTER DIRECTORS ARE ALSO FEELING THE PRESSURE OF THE 2.5 PERCENT CUT TO THEIR BUDGETS. BUT AT THE SAME TIME THEY'RE ALSO PAYING HIGHER RENTS. AS A RESULT, MORE OF THEIR INCOME MUST GO TOWARDS RENT, AND LESS TOWARD SERVICES.

SENIORS WITH NO EXTENDED FAMILY ARE AT RISK FOR DEPRESSION, BECAUSE THEY BECOME SOCIALLY ISOLATED. THIS IS WHY SENIOR CENTERS ARE SO IMPORTANT. THEY ARE BEDROCKS IN THE COMMUNITY. NOT ONLY DO THEY PROVIDE MEALS FOR AGING ADULTS, THEY OFFER FUN ACTIVITIES AND THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SENIORS NEED.

WE MUST MAKE SURE TO KEEP ALL SENIOR CENTERS OPEN. I URGE DEPUTY MAYOR GIBBS AND DFTA TO SLOW DOWN THE PROCESS AND NOT ASK ALL 329 SENIOR CENTERS TO REAPPLY FOR THEIR CONTRACT AT THE SAME TIME. I WANT

TO THANK DFTA FOR DELAYING THE RELEASE OF THE SENIOR CENTER R-F-P, AND URGE THEM TO NOT RELEASE IT UNTIL DFTA HAS FIGURED OUT ALL THE QUIRKS IN THE CASE MANAGEMENT AND MEALS-ON-WHEELS PROGRAMS. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO RUSH THROUGH THE SENIOR CENTER R-F-P PROCESS ON A LARGE SCALE IN THE MIDDLE OF BUDGET CUTS.

I ALSO URGE THE MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND DFTA TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP NYCHA SENIOR CENTERS OPEN. NUMEROUS STUDIES SHOW THAT NYCHA SENIOR CENTERS ARE IN NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE THERE IS A HIGH CONCENTRATION OF ELDERLY POOR. THE BLOOMBERG ADMINISTRATION RELEASED A NEW MEASURE THAT RECONFIGURED POVERTY, SHIFTING THE POVERTY RATE AMONG OLDER NEW YORKERS FROM 18 PERCENT TO 32 PERCENT. THAT MEANS 1 IN 5 SENIORS ARE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. WHAT WOULD THESE SENIORS DO IF NYCHA SENIOR CENTERS WERE CLOSED?

ANOTHER CRITICAL ISSUE FOR ALL OF BROOKLYN, ESPECIALLY OUR SENIORS, IS AFFORDABLE HOUSING. I'M ALMOST A SENIOR MYSELF, AND AS BABY-BOOMERS BEGIN TO RETIRE, THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR SENIORS WILL BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED. BY THE YEAR 2030, NEW YORK'S ELDERLY POPULATION IS EXPECTED TO BE 1.84 MILLION — WHICH IS A 47 PERCENT INCREASE FROM THE YEAR 2000.

WE NEED TO BE AS CREATIVE AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO PRODUCE MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR SENIORS.

WE NEED TO CREATE MORE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS THAT EARMARK A CERTAIN NUMBER OF UNITS ON LOWER FLOORS OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS FOR SENIORS, WORKING FAMILIES, AND THOSE WITH LOW- OR MIDDLE-INCOMES. WE MUST KEEP HOUSING FOR SENIORS AFFORDABLE FOREVER!

AND FOR SENIORS WHO WANT TO STAY IN THEIR CURRENT HOMES, WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THEY KNOW ABOUT EXISTING PROGRAMS THAT HELP THEM LOWER THEIR UTILITY BILLS. THERE ARE PROGRAMS OUT THERE THAT PROVIDE AFFORDABLE HEATING OIL FOR SENIORS ON A FIXED INCOME, PERFORM WEATHERIZATION ASSESSMENTS, AND REPLACE APPLIANCES THAT ARE ENERGY INEFFICIENT. AFTER THESE ASSESSMENTS ARE DONE, SENIOR HOME OWNERS NOTICE A SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS. OTHER PROGRAMS PROVIDE A LIST OF SENIOR-FRIENDLY CONTRACTORS TO ASSIST IN HOME REPAIRS. WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT SENIORS ARE AWARE OF THESE PROGRAMS, ESPECIALLY BABY BOOMERS WHO ARE BEGINNING TO ADJUST TO A FIXED INCOME. THAT'S WHY I URGE DFTA TO WORK WITH COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS TO GET THE WORD OUT TO SENIOR HOME OWNERS. PERHAPS DFTA COULD WORK WITH UTILITY COMPANIES TO INCLUDE INSERTS WITH UTILITY BILLS THAT EXPLAIN THE AVAILABLE PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS.

UNFORTUNATELY, SOME SENIORS ARE FACING HOME FORECLOSURES DUE TO PREDATORY LENDING PRACTICES. OTHERS HAVE A MONTHLY MORTGAGE PAYMENT HIGHER THAN THEIR FIXED INCOME. THESE PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE ORGANIZATIONS OUT THERE THAT CAN WORK ON THEIR BEHALF TO NEGOTIATE WITH BANKS SO THEIR MORTGAGE IS LOWERED, OR WORK WITH THEM TO HELP THEM MAKE THEIR MONTHLY MORTGAGE PAYMENTS. SENIORS SHOULD NOT HAVE TO LOSE THEIR HOME IN THEIR TWILIGHT YEARS.

TRANSPORTATION IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT CONCERN FOR OLDER BROOKLYNITES. I WANT TO APPLAUD THE M-T-A FOR INCREASING THE NUMBER OF ACCESSIBLE SUBWAY STATIONS FROM 14 TO 53, OUT OF MORE THAN 150 SUBWAY STATIONS.

ALSO, I URGE DFTA TO WORK WITH THE M-T-A TO HELP IMPROVE ACCESS-A-RIDE. IT IS STILL NOT PERFORMING AS WELL AS IT SHOULD. FOR INSTANCE, PARA-TRANSIT VEHICLES ARE STILL LATE FOR THEIR SCHEDULED PICKUP TIME. THIS IMPACTS SENIORS (MORE THAN 400,000 SENIORS IN NEW YORK ARE DISABLED), AS WELL AS INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TREMENDOUSLY, BECAUSE THEY RELY ON ACCESS-A-RIDE TO GET TO IMPORTANT DOCTOR APPOINTMENTS. I URGE YOU TO WORK TOWARD REDUCING THE PICK-UP WINDOW TO 15 MINUTES OR LESS.

IN MY TESTIMONY LAST YEAR, I ASKED DFTA HOW IT PLANNED TO PREPARE BABY BOOMERS FOR RETIREMENT IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. I WANT TO THANK THE AGENCY FOR WORKING WITH MY OFFICE IN COORDINATING A BABY BOOMER RETIREMENT FAIR.

AS SOMEONE WHO THREE YEARS AGO BECAME ELIGIBLE TO JOIN THE SENIOR CENTER I FOUNDED 34 YEARS AGO IN FLATBUSH, I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH ALL OF YOU TO ENSURE THAT OUR S SENIORS' SUNSET YEARS ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS THEY CAN POSSIBLY BE.

SURELY WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT THE "MATURE-ER" RESIDENTS OF NEW YORK CITY HAVE PAID THEIR DUES, AND HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO GET A LITTLE ATTENTION FROM THOSE OF US IN GOVERNMENT. IT IS TIME FOR ALL OF US TO BE AS CREATIVE AS POSSIBLE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR INCREASING SENIOR POPULATION.

WE ALL KNOW TIMES ARE TOUGH, BUT OUR ROLE IS NOT TO PLACE THE ONUS ON THOSE WHO ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD IT. WE MUST SOFTEN THE IMPACT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE PAID THEIR DUES, THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR OUR CITY TO FLOURISH.