



Testimony on the 2017-2018 Executive
Budget Proposal – Human Services

Sandy Myers

Director, Government and External Relations

Selfhelp Community Services

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Governor's proposed Executive Budget for 2017-2018. My name is Sandy Myers and I'm the Director of Government and External Relations at Selfhelp Community Services.

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 27 sites throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. Selfhelp provides a broad set of important 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 avoid institutionalization.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; ten affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three 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 Selfhelp's acclaimed Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship programs; and the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony about our FY18 State budget priorities.

Protect Federal Title XX Funding for Seniors

New York State receives \$98 million in annual Federal Title XX funding that is allocated to counties. Of this amount, \$66 million is set aside for Adult Protective and Domestic Violence Services, \$5 million supports training activities for county and State staff, and \$27 million is for all other services, which counties can use at their discretion to fund certain services. The proposed budget would require the \$27 million for all "other eligible services" to be used to support Child Care subsidy costs. NYC currently receives \$18.6 million for "other eligible services," which has historically been provided to the City's Department for the Aging (DFTA) to support senior centers.

Title XX funds provide vital nutrition, socialization and health promotion activities to seniors. Selfhelp's five senior centers, including one of New York City's Innovative Senior Centers, offer a wide variety of life-enhancing programs such as computer classes, concerts and lectures, health and wellness workshops, as well as nutritious meals for seniors living in the surrounding communities. Our senior centers serve close to 10,000 older adults in a variety of educational and social activities. We take particular pride in creating programs and services that reflect the culture of each local community. **We urge the State to restore the Title XX funding to be used for services to older adults.**

N/NORCS Budget Cuts and Program Closures

As New Yorkers age, an increasing number of residents will require the special health and social services facilitated by Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs (NNORCs). These vital programs and resources help enable low-middle income New Yorkers age in place, thrive in their communities and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement.

Selfhelp provides health and social services at four Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) located throughout Queens. NORCs are housing complexes with a large proportion of residents over 60. Because many of the tenants wish to remain in their homes and now require essential support to do so, NORC programs, including those managed by Selfhelp, provide senior residents with the supportive services they need to continue living in their own homes. These include: case management, supportive counseling, health screenings, and social, recreational, and educational programs.

Case management services provided by a professional social worker may include supportive counseling, financial management and long term care planning, referral to community resources and help with applying for and securing entitlements and benefits. Our registered nurses provide blood pressure and other medical screenings and evaluations for additional services including skilled nursing care, psychiatric treatment, physical therapy and hospice care. Ambulatory and wheelchair-assisted seniors can utilize our mini-van that makes weekly trips to supermarkets, banks, shopping malls and nearby cultural and recreational points of interest.

There are a variety of volunteer opportunities at our NORCs that provide greater social interaction and community participation. Residents may escort other seniors on shopping trips, visit those who are lonely or homebound, provide telephone reassurance, work in our office, join the Advisory Council, plan and lead recreation activities or get involved in fundraising projects.

In the FY 2016-2017 Enacted Budget, significant legislative changes were made to the NORC program. The New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) has released a Request for Applications (RFA) for N/NORCS that reflect the statutory changes, but only plans to fund 12 classic NORCs and 12 neighborhood NORCs. There are currently 16 classic NORCs and 13 neighborhood NORCs supported by NYSOFA.

Without any changes to the proposed FY 2017-2018 budget and RFA, five existing NORC programs will be forced to close. Governor Cuomo's FY 2017-2018 Executive Budget eliminates the additional \$350,000 for NORCs and \$350,000 for Neighborhood NORCs that was included in the FY 2016-2017 Enacted Budget.

Furthermore, the RFA and the current budget allocation do not allow for expansion of the program, despite the fact that the legislation was updated last year with expansion in mind. Additional funding is vital to ensure that current NORCs can continue to provide services, particularly health care management services, and to grow the program to underserved areas with increasing aging populations.

We urge the State to restore \$700,000 from FY16-17 and invest an additional \$5.25 million in the N/NORC program to preserve the existing 29 NYSOFA-funded NORCs, and allow for the creation of 21 new NORCs across the State to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population of seniors.

Conclusion

In the 2016 State of the State address, Governor Cuomo announced a new initiative that would make New York the first “age-friendly state in accord with the eight Age Friendly/Livable Community Domains outlined by the World Health organization and AARP”. We applaud this effort, and suggest that this proposal is very much in sync with the Governor’s stated goal. Senior services saves money and improves quality of life. We owe that to the elders of our state. We encourage your support of the restoration of Title XX funding for senior centers and funding for NORCs.