



TESTIMONY

New York State Senate and New York State Assembly
SFY26 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Human Services

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Submitted by:
Bryan J Ellicott-Cook
Director of Government Relations

On behalf of SAGE and the LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV whom we serve, thank you to the members of the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today and providing a platform to present SAGE's FY26 State Budget priorities.

Founded in New York in 1978, SAGE is the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ older people. and we have been serving LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV for over four decades. We provide comprehensive social services and community-building programs through our network of LGBTQ+ welcoming older adult centers across New York City – called "SAGE Centers" – and through our partners across the state, including in the Hudson Valley, Syracuse, and Rochester. SAGE has also worked with leading developers to open New York's first two LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing developments located in Brooklyn and the Bronx, each of which house a state-of-the-art, ground-floor SAGE Center that provides comprehensive LGBTQ+-centered aging services.

Services for older New Yorkers are crucial as the population of New Yorkers aged 60 and older is growing five times faster than those under 18, with LGBTQ+ elders making up a significant part of this rapidly growing older population. Additionally, people over 50 are acquiring HIV at increasing rates. In 2023, New York State reported 2,029 new HIV diagnoses, with 12.6% (256 cases) occurring among individuals aged 50 and older. This age group now comprises 57% of the 105,447 people living with diagnosed HIV in the state, with 74% of all cases occurring among those aged 40 and older. Furthermore, older adults are more likely to receive a concurrent AIDS diagnosis, with 36% of new HIV

cases among those over 50 being diagnosed with AIDS within 30 days of their initial diagnosis¹. These statistics highlight the growing need for targeted prevention, care, and support services for older adults, including transgender and non-binary individuals, to ensure equitable access to healthcare and resources.

Despite the size of these populations, LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV are often invisible, disconnected from services, and severely isolated. As they age and need more assistance and care, LGBTQ+ elders and people aging with HIV have fewer familial options than older people in general. They often cannot rely on children, spouses, or relatives for care and rarely have the financial resources to pay for private in-home care. Because of their thin support networks, LGBTQ+ older people need to rely more heavily on community service providers for care as they age. Yet, they're often distrustful of mainstream providers, as LGBTQ+ elders have faced a long history of compounding discrimination.

Further, many older New Yorkers living with HIV never expected to live into their later years and cashed in their savings, retirement, and life insurance plans to pay for their immediate needs and support their community during the height of the epidemic.

Further LGBTQ+ elders experience significant health disparities, including increased rates of disability, poor physical and mental health, and alcohol and tobacco use. About 14% of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers over 50 report frequent poor physical health and transgender New Yorkers of all ages are nearly 50% more likely to report being in fair or poor health when compared to non-transgender respondents, even when controlling for age and education. These health disparities are also rooted in the lack of access to competent, inclusive, and affordable health care systems, and social isolation.

LGBTQ+ elders and older people living with HIV continue to be impacted by the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly expanding cost of living. This is not only because of their age, but also high levels of underlying health conditions, higher levels of poverty, food and housing insecurity, lower access to health care and supportive services, and mistrust of government and other institutions based on discrimination and mistreatment. All of these challenges are even further exacerbated for transgender elders and LGBTQ+ older people of color.

SAGE's programs and services address these challenges and connect LGBTQ+ elders and older people living with HIV to the support they need. SAGE continues to evolve and expand to address the widespread disparities facing LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV, with comprehensive services through our state's first LGBTQ+ friendly affordable elder housing developments, a network of SAGE Centers throughout New York City, partners across New York State, care management, our statewide SAGEVets program, and other related programming and services.

One example is SAGE's services co-located in the LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing developments: Stonewall House in Brooklyn, and Crotona Pride House in the Bronx. SAGE's programs

¹ [HIV/AIDS Statistics in New York State - New York State Department of Health](#)

and services are crucial to stabilizing low-income and formerly homeless elders who moved into these buildings. Among the services SAGE provides are SAGE Center programming, wellness checks, grocery delivery, and care coordination with other providers and caregivers. Both developments are in neighborhoods with few services for the LGBTQ+ community, resulting in significant demand in services, especially among the low-income and formerly homeless elders living in and around these developments.

Another example is our SAGEVets program a statewide initiative that was created with support from the New York State Legislature to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ older veterans.¹ SAGEVets supports LGBTQ+ older veterans by helping them navigate the VA to get the benefits they deserve; aiding their overall health and wellness; and, providing referrals to counsel for assistance with discharge status upgrades – all while improving veterans-serving organizations’ LGBTQ+ competency. Additionally, thanks to the enactment of the New York Restoration of Honor Act, SAGEVets also provides support with discharge upgrades for older veterans who were discharged due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The military’s long history of enforcing anti-gay and anti-trans policies followed by the discriminatory “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) law, has created many barriers between older LGBTQ+ veterans and their Federal VA benefits. Helping ensures these LGBTQ+ older veterans gain access to all the Federal VA benefits to which they are entitled can provide life-changing support while also saving New York State significant amounts of funding. It ensures that all veterans, including LGBTQ+ veterans, can access all their federal benefits, instead of relying solely on State programs to address their housing and healthcare needs.

As noted above, there is also a pressing need to increase services and support for the growing population of New Yorkers aging with HIV—a rapidly expanding cohort of people living with HIV. In fact, 74% of New Yorkers living with HIV are projected to be over the age of 50 by 2030. New York must start making meaningful investments to ensure this growing population has the support they need to age-in-place in their communities. SAGEPositive connects HIV-affected elders and those at risk for HIV to a wide range of services, including sexual wellness workshops, social events, HIV and STI testing, case management, caregiver support, educational forums, and more. Expanding the successful SAGEPositive program across the state with a new funding designation—following the proven model of the statewide SAGEVets program—will help meet the needs of older people living with HIV and long-term survivors.

Finally, our newly launched SAGETrans program is an essential initiative designed to support and empower transgender and non-binary older adults. Considering the current political climate, where transgender rights are increasingly under scrutiny, and trans people are faced with increasingly draconian discriminatory policies, the need for such services is more critical than ever. SAGETrans provides a safe space and vital resources for transgender and non-binary individuals over the age of 50, who often experience a compounded marginalization due to their age and gender identity. By offering services like healthcare support, social connection, legal assistance, and advocacy, the program helps to bridge gaps in resources that many older transgender individuals face, which is crucial in this political environment

To support the vital programming and services for LGBTQ+ older New Yorkers outlined above, SAGE respectfully requests the following designation in the SFY26 Budget, totaling \$1,100,000 in funding from the New York State Legislature. This includes \$650,000 of continued funding and \$450,000 to expand programming for the growing population of older New Yorkers living with HIV and the increasingly marginalized population of transgender and non-binary older New Yorkers:

- **\$300,000** (renewal) to support residents in New York State’s first LGBTQ+-welcoming elder housing developments. This includes care management and support services to low-income, predominately LGBTQ+, elder residents in and around these developments, and in-person SAGE Center programming, general services, and expenses in operating the ground-floor SAGE Centers located in these buildings.
- **\$200,000** (renewal) for our SAGEVets program, a statewide program that supports LGBTQ+ elders who are veterans, by helping them navigate the VA to get the benefits they deserve; improving their overall health and wellness; and, providing referrals to counsel regarding discharge status upgrades.
- **\$150,000** (renewal) to support SAGE’s culturally-competent care management services at SAGE Center Bronx and SAGE Center Brooklyn, located in Crotona Pride House and Stonewall House respectively.
- **\$150,000** (new funding request) to help meet the growing demand for outreach and service for older New Yorkers living with HIV through the expansion of our SAGEPositive program across the state.
- **\$300,000** (new funding request) to support the expansion of SAGETrans₂ offering support services to transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and/or intersex people over 50 across New York, including case management, support groups, social events, referrals and more.

Thank you so much to the New York State Legislature for its past and enduring support of SAGE’s work and for providing me with this opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with you to address the needs of LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders in New York and answering any of your questions.

Bryan J. Ellicott-Cook

Director of Government Relations

ⁱ VA Homeless Programs, “[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and all sexual and gender minority \(LGBTQ+\) people](#)” January 2022.