Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the Executive Budget hearing.

LiveOn NY’s members include more than 110 community-based nonprofits that provide core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our communities as we age, including Older Adult Centers, home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, NORCs, and case management. LiveOn NY is also home to the Reframing Aging NYC Initiative, part of the national Reframing Aging Initiative aimed to counteract ageism and improve the way policymakers, stakeholders, and the public think about aging and older people. With our members, we work to make New York a better place to age.

As New York City recovers from a pandemic that took the lives of tens of thousands of individuals, this budget will set the trajectory for years to come and must bolster the City towards a future that supports all New Yorkers. Yet for too long, older adults have not been prioritized by the City and the pandemic has exposed the many systemic inequalities and challenges older adults face including an over-reliance on institutionalization, chronic social isolation, and an inequitable care system.

Within the Executive Budget, LiveOn NY is appreciative of the following investments to better support the needs of older New Yorkers including: $14.9 million for the Recovery Meal Program transition, a continued commitment to the home-delivered meal reimbursement rate increase; and $3.2 million for Department for the Aging (DFTA) Geriatric Mental Health Program expansion. These investments are a step towards bolstering a system that has been essential to supporting older New Yorkers through COVID-19, and will continue to be essential in the years to come.

Nonetheless, the Mayor’s Executive Budget fell short in addressing some of the most pressing issues facing older New Yorkers and the aging services sector; this, most evidenced by the lack of a cost-of-living adjustment for the aging and human services workforce at-large. As a result, today, the DFTA budget remains at less than 1% of the overall City budget despite older adults representing a rapidly increasing 20% of the population. To create an equitable budget that supports all New Yorkers, the City must prioritize long-term investments that reflect the growing demand for community-based aging services and that leaves no New Yorker behind.

Therefore, LiveOn NY’s recommends the following investments, many of which were championed in the City Council’s Preliminary Budget Response, and we hope to see continued prioritization of as the City reaches a final budget:

**Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Recommendations**

1. **The City must just pay all essential human service workers a liveable and equitable wage.** Without Just Pay, the wages of workers under these contracts, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are slated to remain stagnant in a City where costs are notoriously high and
inflation continues to rise. The decision to actively avoid building in the true costs of a core function of City government will put further strain on the diverse workforce that has worked tirelessly to support New Yorkers, particularly during the pandemic. To address this crisis, the City must address the inequitable pay of human services workers, including:

- Establish, fund, and enforce a 5.4% automatic annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or fund $86 million for wage increases for all human services contracts.
- Set a living wage floor of no less than $21 an hour for all human service workers.
- Create, fund, and incorporate a comprehensive wage and benefit schedule for government contracted human services workers comparable to the salaries made by City and State employees in the same field.

2. **$42.7 million in additional funding to meet the home-delivered meal (HDM) demand.**

Despite the Recovery Meal program being set to end this Fiscal Year, we are confident that many clients will continue to need nutritional support – support for which there is not enough funding available to provide. Ideally, these clients will transition to the traditional HDM program, which already serves approximately 20,000 older New Yorkers. An investment of $30 million will allow for a smooth transition to ensure every older New Yorker continues to receive a meal after the termination of this program.

In addition, an investment of $9.7 million will support the continued growth in demand for the HDM program, and at least $3 million to support **weekend and holiday home-delivered meals**, which are not provided through current contracts, and did not receive the same investment to address reimbursement rate as weekday meals received.

**Furthermore, DFTA must assess and invest in home-delivered meal provider’s capital needs, including van purchases and other infrastructure needs.** Many of LiveOn NY’s members have raised concerns about capacity issues including the need for larger kitchen spaces, new refrigerators, and van purchases in particular as they work to meet rising demand.

**Just as funding is needed to support home-delivered meals, the City must also increase funding for congregate meals in Older Adult Centers** as a response to the significant inflationary impacts on raw food.

3. **Allocate funding to develop 1,000 units of affordable senior housing with services per year.**

LiveOn NY joins the United for Housing Coalition in calling for a $4 billion annual investment to fund a comprehensive affordable housing plan that must include a minimum target of 1,000 new units of affordable senior housing with services per year, as part of a total target to construct no fewer than 8,000 new units of housing dedicated to serving extremely low income and homeless households annually. As waitlists and limited housing stock pose an acute challenge for older New Yorkers, and with the number of older adults experiencing homelessness expected to triple by 2030 without significant intervention, a considerable investment and consistent unit targets per year will be critical to paving a pathway out of this crisis.
LiveOn NY also recommends the City increase the per unit reimbursement rate for City’s Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) services from $5,000 per unit, to $7,500 per unit, allowing for increased staff to more adequately address social isolation and significant case assistance needs.

4. Allocate an additional $40 million to build upon DFTA’s Community Care Initiative and bolster mental health supports

The Community Care Plan, initiated by DFTA, works to expand investments in critical services to support an older adult’s ability to age in place. Building upon this plan and recognizing the growing mental health needs across the City, LiveOn NY recommends:

- A new $7.5 million technology investment to expand DFTA virtual programming accessibility, through an online database, devices and connectivity. This would also create a new program to promote tech literacy among older adults by funding community-based organizations to offer this support.
- $5 million to support growth in demand of the case management program to ensure all clients can be screened and receive this critical service should they be eligible. In addition, fund $28 million to support growth in demand for the home care program, including expanding the service hours available to older adults requiring additional support.
- $8.7 million to expand the Geriatric Mental Health program that provides critical mental health services to older adults

5. Fund an additional $2.6 Million for Support our Seniors and continued full funding for all discretionary initiatives.

Many programs, particularly smaller, hyper-local nonprofits that serve hard-to-reach senior populations rely on discretionary funding to ensure their communities can be served. Therefore, it is critical that all aging services discretionary initiatives, including for programs such as Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Social Adult Day programs, are fully funded in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget.

As long-standing supporters of NORCs, the Council plays a key role in supporting this system. This year, we call on the Council to restore its NORC Council Initiative at close to $6.4 million. For the portion of these funds that cover nursing services, about $2.1 million, the Council should reflect the rising hourly rate of nurses from the provider, VNS, from $85 to $95 per hour. This brings the nursing funding need to $2.265 million this year. This full initiative should also be restored to support existing recipients, including State-contracted Neighborhood NORCs which do not have City contracts. While a few Council-funded NORCs received new DFTA contracts this year, we hope the Council will continue to support the ongoing development of new NORCs with this initiative.

LiveOn NY is also requesting an additional $2.6 million for the Support Our Senior Initiative that would provide an additional $50,000 per district on average to better support older New Yorkers, in particular for services or programs including transportation, social isolation,
technology and more.

We believe that every New Yorker deserves the ability to age in community with access to services regardless of one’s zip code or background. To truly make New York a better place to age, where we can all thrive in community, we must build a caring economy that supports all older New Yorkers regardless of their background. From a livable wage for all human services workers to policies and programs that support all New Yorkers, New York can become a more equitable place to age.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LiveOn NY’s members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.

LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.