Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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, such as older adult centers, home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, NORCs, and home care. 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.

**Background**

In New York City, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) older adults are the pioneers of the LGBTQIA+ movement who stood at Stonewall and paved the way for the younger generation. LGBTQIA+ older New Yorkers refuse to be invisible yet face unique and serious obstacles as they age, with many LGBTQIA+ people facing years of stigma and discrimination throughout their lives. Too often, LGBTQIA+ older people have thinner support networks, creating a growing demand for LGBTQIA+ affirming community-based services and care that are culturally competent in understanding the challenges of the LGBTQIA+ community. These services include LGBTQIA+ affirming housing developments, access to affordable healthcare services, programs that support individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other community-based services such as Older Adult Centers and Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs).

Community-based organizations including our members, SAGE, Queens Community House, which operates the Queens Center for Gay Seniors, DOROT, which offers an Intergenerational LGBTQIA+ Affinity Group, and others, are a trusted source for older adults and provide critical services for LGBTQIA+ people. Yet the City can do more to support LGBTQIA+ older adults and fund services that address the disparities impacting older adults including LGBTQIA+ older adults.
All New Yorkers deserve the ability to age in community with access to equitable services regardless of their zip code and background. To create a city that supports all New Yorkers, the City must make long-term investments in older adults and community-based services that supports LGBTQIA+ older adults, and empower and uplift a community that for too long has been invisible.

**Recommendations**

*Expand Access to Equitable LGBTQIA+ Affirming Services*

The City should ensure that LGBTQIA+ competent aging services are offered in a culturally and linguistically competent manner to better reach LGBTQ+ older adults including communities of color. Due to the thinner networks, many LGBTQIA+ older adults rely on community-based services to access critical support. Yet, LGBTQIA+ older adults are often disconnected to critical services, such as LGBTQIA+ affirming health services and aging services as well as face concern about discrimination from staff and others at traditional older adult centers, long-term care and other aging services.

The City should continue to support new models of service including grab-and-go meals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity among older adults was deeply exacerbated by issues not only economic, but related to access as older adults were required to “stay at home” to reduce the chances of contracting COVID-19. New models of service such as grab-and-go were critical and successful in ensuring older adults, including LGBTQIA+ older adults, who may not be comfortable congregating due to COVID risks, or for personal reasons are less willing to meet their nutritional needs by eating at an Older Adult Center, have the option to take their meal home, a decision that ensures one’s nutritional needs can be met in the environment of one's choosing.

In addition, LiveOn NY also recommends the City expands LGBTQIA+ competent mental health services for older adults to combat loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Often, there are few opportunities for LGBTQIA+ older people to socialize in age-friendly and LGBTQIA+ inclusive environments, resulting in nearly 60% of LGBTQIA+ older people feeling a lack of companionship and over 50% reporting feeling isolated from others¹. In recognition of this, LiveOn NY appreciates Speaker Adrienne Adams prioritization of this issue during her recent State of the City address, by calling for increased government support for initiatives to create more diversity among mental health professionals to increase access to care for LGBTQIA+ people, immigrants and communities of color.

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**Invest in Affordable Housing**

The City must invest in LGBTQIA+ affirming affordable housing. Across the City, older adults face difficulties with finding affordable housing with rising rent prices and over half of older New Yorkers are rent-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on rent. The housing crisis in New York City is particularly acute for older adults including LGBTQIA+ older New Yorkers as many rely on fixed incomes, making it difficult to afford the rent while other costs continue to rise. In addition, much of the City’s housing infrastructure is inadequate to accommodate an older adult’s health and mobility needs, with 70% of the City’s housing stock only navigable by at least one set of stairs.

LiveOn NY recommends the City allocates funding to develop 1,000 units of affordable senior housing with services per year. While the Adopted Budget included investments to support affordable housing programs, the City needs to go further to fully address the need for affordable senior housing. The investment of a minimum target of 1,000 new units of affordable senior housing with services per year, is 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 called for by the United for Housing coalition. As waitlists and limited housing stock pose an acute challenge for older New Yorkers, 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 increases increase the per unit reimbursement rate for the City’s Senior Affordable Rental Assistance (SARA) services from $5,000 per unit, to $7,500 per unit, to fund two housing staff positions at each building to provide support for the residents to more adequately address social isolation and significant case assistance needs.

Today, nearly one-third of LGBTQIA+ older people live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, compared to a quarter of non-LGBTQIA+ people as shown in the recent SAGE and AARP New York report, “Disrupting Disparities: Solutions for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers Age 50+.” All older New Yorkers should have access to safe and affordable housing yet many older LGBTQIA+ older adults fear having to re-closet to access senior housing. No one should have to hide who they are to access equitable housing especially as the majority of older adults would prefer the opportunity age in their community, surrounded by the networks of support built over a lifetime.

The City must double down on its commitment to provide affordable housing for LGBTQIA+ people. To address this crisis the City:
● Preserve existing affordable elder housing including supporting LGBTQIA+ welcoming affordable elder housing with adequate funding to address the disparities faced by LGBTQ+ elders.
● Develop new LGBTQ+ affirming housing options and innovative LGBTQIA+ elder housing models.

Expand Data Collection

The City should improve the LGBTQIA+ data collection to understand the needs of LGBTQIA+ older adults. Many older people and LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers will remain invisible until the City enhances its efforts to collect, analyze, and report LGBTQIA+ and age-inclusive data. In particular, a lifetime of discrimination has adversely affects LGBTQIA+ people, particularly, people of color from racial inequality to anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination that create barriers in safely aging in community.

LiveOn NY recommends the City should improve data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity to better identify and address health disparities and aging services gaps among LGBTQIA+ older people of color. Collecting more and better data is essential to understand disparities in our communities. The lack of data puts policymakers in unknown territory as they craft policies that have the potential to significantly affect the lives and wellbeing of older and LGBTQIA+ people including people of color.

Additionally, LiveOn NY strongly supports the Council Member Hudson and Council Member Caban’s new legislation, which would establish a commission on LGBTQIA+ older adults within the Department for the Aging (DFTA).

It’s critical the City works to ensure all LGBTQIA+ older adults have access to equitable LGBTQIA+ services to safely age in community. This bill would establish a commission for LGBTQIA+ older adults within DFTA who would help to identify challenges, share best practices, and develop expert recommendations on ways to improve the quality of life of LGBTQIA+ older adults. LiveOn NY appreciates the diversity of voices represented on the commission including community-based organizations to understand the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony provided by Brianna Paden-Williams, Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY
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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.