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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

NEW YORK DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING
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TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY
MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT GALE A. BREWER
ON THE DFTA ANNUAL PLAN SUMMARY 2015-2016

Good morning Commissioner Corrado. My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the plan submitted by the Department for the Aging for the next fiscal year.

First, I would like to thank Commissioner Corrado for joining me and several city agencies on a tour I organized this summer with Cornell Cooperative Extension of farms and dairies in New York's Orange and Ulster Counties. Increasing agency local sourcing while improving access to fresh food is a win-win for New Yorkers. I applaud the support that the Commissioner and the Bureau of Community Services' Nutrition Unit staff have placed on encouraging the purchasing of fresh and local food in our senior center congregate and home delivered meal programs.

DFTA continues to be an international and national leader in creating policies to benefit older adults, as our senior population increases. It is particularly important that DFTA continue to integrate age-friendly services across city agencies. In addition to working with the Area Agency on Aging, which is responsible for the Age-Friendly NYC Initiative, DFTA is collaborating with NYCHA, NYPD, and Parks, Finance, Transportation, and other Departments to improve the lives of older adults.

This integrated approach leads to improved street safety, better park access, and housing policies that support aging-in-place - the kinds of basic support that seniors tell us they require. DFTA's creative public-private partnerships with businesses, schools, and non-profit organizations should be increased. They expand DFTA's capacity to improve the lives of older adults, and provide a model for other municipalities as well as federal policy.

In the same vein, I recommend that DFTA continue to expand its service potential by having its services providers connect to and better utilize local community resources. Senior centers should be connecting to neighborhood businesses, cultural centers, colleges and universities, and parks facilities to expand program offerings, accommodate diverse populations, and serve more people. These local resources can be especially effective in combating social isolation and mental health issues, and increasing digital literacy among older adults— all concerns outlined in DFTA's annual plan.

I laud the creativity and innovation at the DFTA Innovative Senior Centers located in Manhattan (Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and

Inwood, Educational Alliance, Carter Burden, Find Aid for the Aged, SAGE and Visions). DFTA should share these program and partnership best-practices throughout the five boroughs. Wonderful partnerships can arise. For example, in 2012, I worked with Goddard Riverside Senior Center and New York Sun Works so that the regular summer harvest of produce from the Manhattan School for Children's hydroponic greenhouse would be enjoyed by local seniors participating in the Goddard congregate meal program. This partnership continues to-date, to the delight of both the students and seniors. With a growing number of public school hydroponic gardens and greenhouses, additional neighborhood senior centers could build on this simple model to provide both fresh food and intergenerational exchange.

In every community district, many seniors are receiving less support than they are eligible for because they lack knowledge of programs and enrollment procedures. Case by case assistance is key to addressing these needs, and as part of its core support DFTA should have a social worker in most centers to improve its screening of older adults - particularly those already in the DFTA system - to identify their total benefit eligibility. My staff works extensively with senior constituents. Their primary needs are housing applications, eviction prevention, NYCHA issues, and SCRIE eligibility; SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI benefits also predominate. This afternoon my office is hosting a SCRIE and DRIE clinic at ARC Fort Washington Senior Center located at 4111 Broadway Avenue, with the Department of Finance, CB9 and my elected colleagues. These "one-stop" outreach efforts are highly effective in educating and enrolling eligible seniors.

Another concern I often hear from seniors is the lack of access to professional and affordable dental services. My office partnered with the New York University Dental School each year to offer free dental services to children from six months to 17 years old through their "Smiling Faces Going Places" mobile dental clinic. Similar services should be available for seniors. I am encouraged by the Oral Care Project being developed by DFTA in partnership with Columbia Dental, DOHMH and Citymeals on Wheels, and my office is offering its support to help connect seniors with additional oral health resources and services.

Finally, I am a long-time supporter of OATS, and I am delighted that "Sustain NYC Connected Communities" funding has been allocated to continue senior technology programs, even after the federal three-year Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant ended in December 2013. I strongly urge that support for these programs be continued. I have seen first-hand how they improve the connectivity and quality of life for so many older adults, with full credit due to the great staff who work within this community.

In summary, I commend DFTA for its work on behalf of the city's seniors, and it is always a pleasure to work with the agency. I am also pleased to continue working with the New York Academy of Medicine toward the goal of making all Manhattan communities Age-Friendly. The challenge for all of us is to obtain more funding for DFTA and the services that the Agency provides. I look forward to that challenge, and encourage all those who are committed to the well-being of our older adults to join and support these age-friendly initiatives.