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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

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**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Aging and  
Committee on Public Housing  
On Seniors Aging in Place in NYCHA During a Pandemic**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Chin of the Committee on Aging and Chair Ampry-Samuel of the Committee on Public Housing for the opportunity to testify.

NYCHA's 2020 Fact Sheet reports 40 senior-only developments citywide, plus 13 other senior-only buildings and addresses among family developments. These buildings, along with developments not designated as senior-only, are homes to over 62,000 public housing residents age 65 or older.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought out needs that are unique to seniors. For example, when the pandemic forced the closure of senior centers, one of the biggest challenges was ensuring that seniors who were on DFTA's senior center rosters were added to the GetFood NYC list so they would start receiving home-delivered meals. The transition was far from smooth, leaving many seniors who used to get their meals in-person at senior centers in a bureaucratic limbo and a delayed start to home deliveries. My staff and I navigated the GetFood NYC registration system to add many seniors who fell through the crack onto the list. The need was especially great among NYCHA residents without internet access. They could not sign up online without assistance.

I support Intro 1827-2019, which would establish a NYCHA liaison within the Department for the Aging. If such a liaison had existed during the early days of the pandemic, the process to transfer all NYCHA seniors in DFTA's records to DSNY for food delivery could have been less piecemeal and more coordinated among the agencies.

Looking ahead, a NYCHA liaison at DFTA should facilitate training for NYCHA seniors who received a tablet but still do not know how to use it to navigate the internet. Additionally, my staff has worked with many NYCHA seniors who remain afraid and do not go out. A NYCHA liaison would be in the ideal position to determine how many seniors in both senior-only buildings and family buildings are in this category, and then to work with DFTA and partner organizations to arrange for regular wellness checks to meet these seniors' needs.

I also support Intro 0415-2018, which requires NYCHA to annually report on senior centers that operate within NYCHA buildings. According to an analysis done by the Regional Plan Association in 2020 using NYC Open Datasets, NYCHA provides facility space for 121 senior centers citywide, or 47.5% of all senior centers in New York City.

Between November 2020 and January 2021, my staff reached out to Manhattan's senior centers to gain a better understanding of their plans and concerns around reopening. Most centers reported that while they were waiting for DFTA to issue guidelines, they have taken the steps to stock up on PPEs and supplies in preparation for when they will reopen. Several centers expressed interest in contracting with DFTA to cook and deliver their own meals in lieu of using GetFood NYC to provide food for their members. Others reported consistent participation of virtual programming but only among seniors who had both the access and the know-how to get online.

The pandemic has changed how senior centers provide services to their members, and upcoming reopenings may not return things exactly back to how they were. It is therefore important to capture data from senior centers such as how many seniors are served, what programs are offered, and the number of concerns raised and resolved among senior centers, that can help establish a baseline for the "new normal." If Intro 0415-2018 passes, the first annual report will offer invaluable data for the current state of NYCHA-based senior centers and how these centers might adapt to operating post-COVID.

Finally, in order for seniors living in NYCHA to age in place well during the current pandemic, they must be able to safely and conveniently access the COVID-19 vaccine.

On March 27, I visited the Johnson Community Center in East Harlem, a pop-up vaccination site for all NYCHA residents that will remain open every Thursday to Sunday through June 20. At the time, New York's vaccine eligibility was for those age 50 and up, so the Johnson site was meant to provide older NYCHA residents with access to the vaccine. To my dismay, there were very few NYCHA residents showed up to get their shot. It was clear that such dismal turnout in a district with the second highest number of public housing in the country was the result of poor communication.

Many senior NYCHA residents have share with me that they do not know where to get the vaccine. For example, Ms. F is homebound and is eligible for the J&J vaccine. She called my office because she did not receive any information from NYCHA on how to have someone come to her apartment and administer the vaccine. It was my staff who helped her schedule an appointment.

NYCHA informed my office that they communicated vaccine information via emails and robocalls, but many seniors do not have email. For residents who received NYCHA's robocalls, they reported that no one answers when they called the phone number provided by the message. And robocalls are not helpful for residents who do not have a phone number nor for those who rely on their home attendant to take their calls if the home attendant does not speak English.

Many NYCHA residents, especially older adults, rely on print communication. Information about the vaccine should be posted outside and inside of management offices in multiple languages, as well as posted in lobbies and on every floor with frequent updates.

I have visited vaccine sites operated by the City and the State. I understand that through the City's pop-up vaccination sites, almost 9,000 NYCHA seniors have been vaccinated as of early April. NYC Health and Hospital Corporation expects the pace of vaccination to increase as more doses of the J&J vaccine becomes available, but that can only be achieved if increased access is paired with more effective outreach to NYCHA seniors.

NYCHA residents cannot safely age in place during a pandemic unless the city is intentional about prioritizing senior public housing residents. I urge the administration and members of the public housing and aging committees to hold NYCHA accountable and to allocate the necessary resources for NYCHA to effectively reach every senior in all its developments.