

March 1, 2019

Re: Affordable Independent Senior Housing Assistance Program

Dear Legislator,

On behalf of a coalition of organizations statewide concerned for New York's senior population, I am writing to ask that you establish an Affordable Independent Senior Housing Assistance Program.

Older New Yorkers are the fastest growing demographic in our state and will comprise an estimated 46 million households statewide by 2030. But New York's stock of affordable senior housing is woefully inadequate to meet this increasing demand. A recent survey of just a sample of senior housing developments in New York indicated that there are more than 100,000 older adults on waiting lists for senior housing, with many more not surveyed. Additionally, over 32% of seniors pay well over 50% of their income for rent or are forced to live in housing that is unsuitable to meet their needs.

This coalition proposes that the 2019-2020 SFY budget include a \$10 million, five-year investment in an **Affordable Independent Senior Housing Resident Assistance Program**. This \$10 million would be used to bolster New York's historic commitment of \$125 million to senior housing and would create a cost-effective model for seniors to age in their own homes with the support of resident assistants. Resident assistants provide "light-touch" services such as maintaining relationships with community-based organizations, providing residents with information and referral lists for community services, arranging for educational and socialization programs, and establishing resident safety programs.

Importantly, there is evidenced-based research to show that low-cost interventions have a significant impact. This model of services would result in significant savings to the State's Medicaid program by preventing or lowering costs of emergency room visits and keeping low-income seniors out of costlier levels of care, such as assisted living or nursing homes. A New York-based study, conducted by Dr. Michael Gusmano of Rutgers University, compared Selfhelp residents with access to resident assistants to a comparison group of seniors in the same zip codes without this support. The study found that the average Medicaid payment per person, per hospitalization was \$1,778 for residents with access to services, versus \$5,715 for the comparison group. Research has shown that resident assistance programs in senior housing promote emotional well-being and stronger social supports, higher resident awareness of services, and better linkages between residents and needed services.

I urge you to support the healthy aging of New York's seniors by establishing the Affordable Independent Senior Housing Assistance Program. We hope that the Senate leadership will make this legislation a priority in this year's budget.

Thank you for your work to ensure that elderly residents throughout the state may continue to live independently and safely in the homes and communities of their choice.

Sincerely,

