



# Queens Civic Congress

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## **NYS ASSEMBLY HEARING ON NYC AGING PLANS & A.10470**

**Testimony by Kevin J. Forrestal, Chair, Health & Human Services to Committees on Aging, Cities, Consumer Affairs & Protection, & Subcommittee on Outreach & Oversight of Senior Citizen Programs**

April 18, 2008

I am Kevin Forrestal, chairperson of the Health and Human Services Committee of Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of more than one hundred neighborhood based civic organizations representing tenants, homeowners, condo and co-op owners residing in communities in every part of Queens. I also serve as president the Hillcrest Estates Civic Association and as a member of Queens Community Board 8.

Queens Civic Congress is mindful that Queens has the highest concentration of elderly of any of New York City's boroughs. Thus, Queens Civic Congress finds troubling the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA) plan to restructure the delivery of service to our elderly neighbors. The Department's plans to transform the way the city delivers services for its aging population proceed without any coherent transition plan.

The reorganization of the case management service, begun on April 1, irresponsibly saddled new contractors with much larger caseloads than were reflected in the service plans of the RFPs; this after the fact caseload increase reflects a reverse cost-overrun. But, instead of just cheating taxpayers, it cheats clients the new RFPs promised to serve at a much greater capacity than the after-the-fact caseloads reasonably allow.

This unconscionable change involves no promise of additional funds that would allow providers to maintain the caseloads intended by the RFP; it likely means, despite the quality of the senior services agencies involved, delays of several months before the new providers can reasonably meet their new responsibilities. Meantime, needy seniors will wait...and wait.

DFTA's expectations of adopting the Bronx meals delivery model for Meals on Wheels (MOW) will not result in any savings. It may increase costs as that model reduces the frequency and number of provider contacts with clients who may not receive timely or any intervention services; that just means more dollars spent later and anyone who looks at costs with a narrow view of impacts on DFTA while ignoring costs borne elsewhere in the city budget demonstrates the utmost irresponsibly (and a lack of understanding of how the city budget works).

Queens Civic Congress understands that the Bronx pilot has resulted in savings of less than \$200,000.00 with no increase in meals delivered.

Further, the pilot offered no customized meals to clients with special cultural and medical requirements that DFTA refers to in its concept paper. This is of particular concern to our diverse borough; if meals fail to reflect the diversity of the clients, fewer clients will use the service and likely fall through the cracks when these seniors require intervention and other services. In addition, Queens, the city's largest borough, presents unique service delivery challenges that received no real consideration in this process.

Converting successful senior centers into "wellness centers" to attract boomers without clearly preparing how to integrate the oldest and neediest seniors—the fastest growing cohort of the aging population—with a younger more active population is of great concern. How DFTA expects the not for profit agencies that contracted with it to meet these challenges in the face of long-term structural shortfalls in funding is a conundrum.

DFTA has not disclosed to Queens residents how it plans to provide transportation services for Queens seniors through the reduced number of senior centers envisioned by the agency's plan. Many seniors – isolated by the very size of the borough and the dearth of reliable public transportation – depend on the reliability and stability of transportation provided by their existing local senior centers.

DFTA recently agreed to postpone issuing its RFP for MOW until May 1 to give providers, advocates and stakeholders an opportunity to prepare for what the agency still considers a fait accompli.

Until now, DFTA has spoken only to carefully selected audiences of seniors, providers and advocates. Although there has been overwhelming response to the most recent concept papers by not-for-profit providers as well as from numerous elderly community residents, the DFTA website offers only current comments from elected officials, and outdated responses from community providers.

Critical comments by Queens Civic Congress and Queens Community Board 8 fail to appear on DFTA's website. These critical omissions strongly suggest a NYC Department for the Aging afraid to expose the truth; that the plan – essentially a scheme as proposed – to save a few pennies on the backs of one of our populations with special needs – fails to meet the needs of our seniors and thus the needs of our city. DFTA needs to hear from – and heed – the larger community: such communication must be consistent with clear indicators of the interest and concerns of our older community residents, seniors' families, civic groups, community boards and elected officials.

Queens Civic Congress urges the State Legislature to require DFTA to provide detailed information about its Bronx MOW program and its proposals for "reform" so that the Legislature can closely examine how DFTA's plans will affect older New Yorkers and their families. Queens Civic Congress therefore supports and urges that the Assembly adopt A.10470.

Meantime, we think you will find the Queens Civic Congress website, [www.queensciviccongress.org](http://queensciviccongress.org), an informative source of information. Thank you for your interest and this opportunity.