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**Testimony of the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) to the Council of the City of New York Aging Committee: Oversight - Age-Friendly NYC Aging Improvement Districts-Successes and Future Challenges.**

Jo Ivey Boufford, MD, President, NYAM

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Good Afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jo Ivey Boufford and I am the President of the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM).

The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) has been advancing the health of people in cities since 1847. An independent, non-profit organization, NYAM addresses the health challenges facing the world’s urban populations through research, education, community engagement, and policy leadership. Our current priorities include fostering environments that support healthy aging; strengthening systems that prevent disease and promote the public’s health; working to eliminate health disparities; and preserving and promoting the history of medicine and public health.

Right now, there are more than 1 million people over 60 living in New York City, and by 2030 this number will increase by 50%. Soon, New York City will have more older adults than school-aged children for the first time in history. Every day roughly 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 and this will continue for the next 19 years. This new longevity is a public health victory we can all be proud of.

In recognition of this trend in population aging, Age-friendly NYC was established in 2007. A partnership between the Office of the Mayor, the New York City Council, and NYAM, Age-friendly NYC works to make all aspects of city life inclusive for older adults. One major part of this effort is the citywide Age-friendly NYC Commission, composed of public and private sector leaders from a wide range of industries, organizations and institutions in New York City who are dedicated to making the city a better place for older adults. A new Commission is currently being recruited and will soon be seated under Mayor DeBlasio. The other major component of Age-friendly NYC was the development and implementation of Aging Improvement Districts, which you will be hearing about today.

Over the past seven years, through Age-friendly NYC, New York has become an internationally recognized model and leader in taking a broad, comprehensive approach to creating a city where it is great to grow old. New York City has made dramatic changes to its environment – from capital investment to no-cost and low-cost simple fixes – and Age-friendly NYC has leveraged its partners in the public and private sector to develop creative solutions. These changes have undeniably improved the city for people of all ages and have often saved the government money. We thank the New York City Council for its continuous support of Age-friendly NYC and especially for its renewed commitment through the $400K allocation for the new Age-friendly Neighborhoods Initiative

**Aging Improvement Districts**

From Age-friendly NYC’s inception, older adults have said that New York is a city of neighborhoods, and that immediate area where they live has become more important to them as they have grown older. Older adults also said that each of the city’s neighborhoods have both their own challenges and strengths and that creative solutions to issues faced by older adults must be developed organically in communities, not only through uniform citywide policy. The innovative concept of Aging Improvement Districts (AID’s) was created to response to this input from older adults.

In March of 2010, Speaker Member Melissa Mark Viverito and NYAM piloted the first Aging Improvement District in East Harlem. The “age-friendliness” of this work (and in all AID’s) begins with consultations with older adults as they are the experts on their own lives. These conversations help to establish the goals and activities for the AID. An advisory group of leaders from the community - which includes older adults, elected officials, senior services, businesses, cultural institutions, housing entities, etc. - is then organized to create the strategy or plan to meet said goals.

The AIDs have served as incubators to test new policies and programs for the overall Age-friendly NYC initiative. These include: the CityBench Program, which has installed over 1000 sidewalk benches across the City; Senior Swim, which offers senior-only swim times at 16 public pools citywide; and the Age-friendly Local Business Initiative, which has engaged over 1000 small businesses in learning how to better attract and serve older customers.

In addition to East Harlem, the Upper West Side, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Pelham Parkway areas have each have piloted an AID. I'd like to share with you just some of the key accomplishments in each of these neighborhoods.

In East Harlem:

* In 2011, the Thomas Jefferson pool established senior swim hours, the first in the City to do so.
* 30 City Benches have been installed in the neighborhood to date, helping improve accessibility for the community’s older adults.
* Ribbon cutting ceremony in June 2013 for new laundry facility in the NYCHA Corsi Houses.

In the Upper Westside:

* An Age-friendly West Side Grocery Guide was developed, outlining the local grocery businesses exhibiting the best practices for addressing the needs of older adults.
* The “Grow Green, Age Well” initiative was established to help seniors eat greener and live longer. These efforts include matching greenmarkets with senior centers and the Westside Senior Supported Agriculture (WSSA) Food Box Program, a bi-monthly program that connects older adults with boxes of affordable, quality produce.
* The Lincoln Square Business Improvement District created a “Community for All Ages” brochure and webpage, outlining the area’s places to stop, sit and relax, a listing of the area's free public art and monuments, public restrooms, and accessibility features.

In Bedford-Stuyvesant:

* Education and technical assistance have been provided to small businesses on how to be age-friendly. A seed fund for small scale improvements was created to cover costs of small scale improvements.
* Workshops for older adults, including senior-only financial workshops, benefits screenings, and computer classes.
* Established a new neighborhood-based corp of older adult volunteers.

In Pelham Parkway:

* Volunteer-led senior computer classes have been held at Throggs Neck Public Library.
* The MTA’s Metro Card Bus is stationed at three different locations in the district to provide seniors with easier access to reduced-fare Metro Cards.
* Westchester Square BID committed to becoming age-friendly by adopting age-friendly principles for community events and encouraging members to become age-friendly businesses; 4 CityBenches have been installed around Westchester Square.

**Age-Friendly Neighborhoods Initiative**

The Age-Friendly Neighborhood Initiative is an expansion of the Aging Improvement District model into 10 additional communities and maintains a commitment to engage local older adults and stakeholders to collaboratively leverage the assets of a community to maximize the social and economic participation of older residents

To be clear, the efforts in East Harlem, the Upper West Side, Bed-Stuy or Pelham that I described would not have been possible without the support of City Council Members and their dedicated staff. The new $400K funding allocation for the Age-friendly Neighborhood initiative in the Fiscal Year 2015 budget demonstrates a renewed commitment to implementing tangible work focused on improving the lives of older New Yorkers.

The Age-friendly Neighborhood Initiative is an assets-based approach to improving the age-friendliness of local neighborhoods and an opportunity to build upon the rich experience of older adults and leverage the strengths of organizations that make each New York City neighborhood unique. Specifically, NYAM will work with Council Members to do the following:

* Conduct consultations with older adults in specified neighborhoods (one large town hall meeting and 1-2 targeted focus groups)
* Assess the neighborhood for age-friendly interventions that are already in place. Such interventions correspond to the City’s 59 age-friendly initiatives and those established by the Commission. (e.g. City Benches, bus shelters, safe streets for seniors projects, age-friendly cultural institutions and colleges and universities with programs for older adults).
* Organize a local advisory committee that will help guide the work of each Age-friendly Neighborhood. This committee will be comprised of stakeholders in the neighborhood that represent various aspects of the community (one advisory committee for each neighborhood).
* Develop the annual plan for each Age-friendly Neighborhood and help announce to the community at individual kick-off events.
* Deliver workshops and trainings to key entities and people that interact regularly with older adults (e.g. landlords, businesses, cultural institutions, constituent service staff, local precincts, etc.) We anticipate 3-4 customized trainings for each neighborhood.
* Organize event programming and catalyze physical improvements to the built-environment. We anticipate 2 for each age-friendly neighborhood.
* Connect older adults to services/opportunities that typically do not target them (e.g. job training, volunteerism, neighborhood events, etc.)
* Create and implement a system for tracking outcomes. The City Council and NYAM will create performance indicators for all Age-friendly Neighborhoods to ensure equity and standards across the network to help measure impact. This will include creating alignment with the Council’s participatory budgeting process.
* Publicize work and accomplishments via a newly built website dedicated to the initiative.

The Speaker’s recent commitment to expand Age-friendly initiatives to all 51 districts by 2018 is a testament to both the work that has been done and the importance of appropriately addressing the needs of older adults as we prepare to see the number of older adults in New York City grow. The New York Academy of Medicine remains committed to being a partner with the New York City Council and the Mayor’s Office in creating the innovations that will improve the day to day lives of our city’s older adults and championing efforts to making New York City more age-friendly.

Thank you.