

**TESTIMONY to:
NYS DIVISION of the BUDGET
PUBLIC HEARINGS on the 2008-2009 BUDGET**

I represent the New York Citizens' Committee on Aging, a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization which for over 45 years has promoted interest in and provided information about the concerns affecting the well-being of New York's aging community. Our organization comprises a broad-based group of leaders within the field of aging including professionals, older and younger persons, representatives of the public, private and voluntary sectors, and representatives of the business, labor, academic and civic communities.

Given the importance that the Division of the Budget plays in monies allocated to programs, often determining which programs go forward, we appreciate having public participation in the decision making process at an early stage.

The New York Citizens' Committee on Aging, concerned with the increasing poverty rate among New York City's elderly, especially among women, minorities and those aged 75 and over, convened a solutions-oriented forum, *Under the Radar: Old and Poor in a City of Riches*, on May 11th. A report: *Under the Radar: Poverty Among Older Adults in New York City*, based on an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey, was presented. It clearly indicates that

poverty can be found among all elderly in every borough of the City but is most likely to be found among women, minorities, and those with disabilities.

Let me give you a few of the key findings from the report. Although poverty is declining nation wide, New York City's elderly poverty rate is twice the national average: 20.3% vs. 9.9%. Nearly 192,000 New Yorkers age 65 and older are estimated to be living in poverty with an annual income below \$9,400. Among the 20 most populous cities in the United States, New York is second only to Detroit, Michigan in the percentage of seniors living in poverty.

We are aware that New York State faces a difficult budget challenge for fiscal year 2008-2009. Nevertheless the plight of the elderly poor in this city and state must not be ignored, especially in light of our growing aging population and the poverty statistics I just cited. With rising costs of housing, fuel, health care and food, older New Yorkers find themselves in critical situations. We call upon you to ensure that the most vulnerable elderly will be protected from the impact of any budget constraints. We challenge you to ensure that the New York State Budget provide what is needed to alleviate poverty among New York City's most vulnerable, living in one of the most affluent cities in the world.

We agree with the statement of the New York City Department for the Aging Annual Plan that "income support is one of the most critical and growing needs among the elderly" (page 16).

We are saddened that for almost 20 years New York State's supplementary contribution to the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit has not been increased – except for a munificent \$1 increase in 1999. Bringing the SSI grant to the poverty level could have a significant impact on reducing elder poverty. Regulations or legislation should be enacted to ensure that an increase of the state's SSI share would not trigger a loss of other benefits for this population.

We cannot stress enough the critical need for more affordable housing units for the elderly and disabled, including affordable assisted living facilities. How can the institutional population be reduced without there being affordable living arrangements in the community? Discharge to the streets? Increased financing for the development of such housing programs should be a priority.

This is especially important because the Section 8 program, a valuable tool in enabling low income elderly to attain affordable housing, has seen a decrease in utilization. Since landlords in the tight housing market are not required by law to accept Section 8 vouchers, they prefer to bring vacant apartments to the open market.

The expansion of the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) is important. It keeps elders in the community and prevents crisis evictions, which could result in more costly placements for the city and state.

We believe that all the savings generated from coordinating EPIC (Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage) with Medicare Part D should be re-

invested in health care where there are so many other needs, beginning with the extension of EPIC to the disabled. This issue of EPIC expansion to the disabled is a matter of the highest priority to the Committee on Aging.

We also strongly support more funding for outreach programs to increase participation in income support services – services such as SCRIE, SSI, Food Stamps, HEAP, Medicaid and congregate and home delivered meals - and suggest that priorities include targeting older adults who are most in need.

Finally, in the on-going development of a Point-of-Entry system (“NY Connects”), it is critical that adequate funding be provided to localities to ensure both consumer-driven access to timely and appropriate level of care and professional case management to enable seamless and safe transfers across service delivery systems.

We invite all decision makers responsible for crafting the Governor’s Executive Budget to join with the New York Citizens’ Committee on Aging in advocating for real, concrete changes in these service areas that could have a meaningful impact on elder poverty in New York City.

In closing, I would like to thank you for inviting us to present our findings on elder poverty in New York City and trust you will take this information into consideration as you devise the fiscal 2008-2009 New York State Budget.