



**TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIAN GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA  
OF THE BROOKDALE CENTER FOR HEALTHY AGING, HUNTER COLLEGE  
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON AGING**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING  
"IMPROVING OLDER NEW YORKERS' ACCESS TO CITY SERVICES"**

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My name is christian gonzález-rivera and I'm the director of strategic policy initiatives at the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, a research and policy center based at Hunter College.

The Brookdale Center supports the spirit of all three bills, Intros. 1650, 1538, and 1696. We would like to direct our comments to Intros. 1650 and 1696.

Intro. 1650 would entitle New Yorkers age 60+ to full legal representation in housing court, expand rental arrears assistance, and establish a housing support program. The need for these services is clear. Fully 61 percent of older New Yorkers are rent burdened, compared to 53 percent of all New Yorkers. Rising rents eat into the fixed incomes of most older adults and make it difficult for them to move to a more affordable home. Also, almost half of older adults have been living in their current homes for more than a decade. In that time, many have developed social networks that they have come to depend on. Housing instability is especially destabilizing for older adults. Thank you for introducing this bill.

Intro 1696 would require older adult centers to expand their cultural and linguistic programs. While we support the premise of the bill, we have concerns about the process outlined in the proposed legislation.

Having each older adult center administer a survey would be a very burdensome way to get the service needs information you are looking for. Creating and disseminating a survey and compiling the results is a very time consuming process and most older adult centers do not have the capacity to take this work on themselves. And the effort is entirely unnecessary because you can get neighborhood-level information about languages spoken in the area around older adult centers by referring to Census data. Older adult center catchment areas also vary significantly in size, so sending a survey to older New Yorkers just a one-mile radius from the centers would not be sufficient. And underserved populations would be less likely to fill out and return a survey.

The better way of getting service needs information is to take advantage of DFTA's capable research department. They can run current demographics on each older adult center's catchment area and provide the results to older adult center directors. That way the older adult center staff can focus their efforts on what they do best: creating and administering programs in service of older New Yorkers. We therefore recommend that the legislation should direct DFTA to work closely with older adult centers to ensure that they are serving the diverse needs of the older adults in their catchment area, using Census data to help identify service needs.

With DFTA's support, older adult centers can then make the necessary partnerships and program adjustments that would allow them to successfully reach diverse populations, such as developing relationships with community organizations that are supporting those communities and conducting targeted outreach to underserved communities.

Thank you, councilmember Hudson for your careful attention to improving the lives of older New Yorkers. We believe that with the adjustments that we suggest, the legislation you have introduced can make a positive difference.

Thank you also for the opportunity to testify.