



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

**HEARING ON INT. 1796-2019 (LEVIN)
(AMEND ADMIN CODE -- REGULATION OF COMMERCIAL RENT)**

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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. We are a research center that is part of Hunter College. We are changing the future of aging by supporting innovative research and developing policies and practices for New York City that will become models used around the world. Through this work, we strive to create opportunities for everyone to age as well as anyone can.

It may seem unusual that a research center dedicated to the study of how people may age better would want to weigh in on a discussion about commercial rent control, but we have good reason for doing so. Commercial rent control holds promise to keep longtime small businesses serving their neighborhoods. Many of these businesses not only add unique character to neighborhoods but are also part of the social fabric of neighborhoods.

And perhaps no group of people benefits the most from the social fabric of a neighborhood than older New Yorkers. More than half of New Yorkers in their 70s and older and almost half of New Yorkers in their 60s have been living in the same place for over a decade. Older New Yorkers are more likely than younger people to have social ties to the place where they live.

And those social ties are very important, especially as a person grows older. These ties could be fostered at a friendly local diner where older people meet with their friends, or a bodega where the owner knows their regulars by name, or a hardware store where regulars can reliably find what they need. These places are nodes in the intricate social web of support that people come to depend on more and more as they age.

That web of support comes under threat when businesses that had been neighborhood stalwarts close down and are replaced with places that cater to new, often younger residents. Every time a long-time business closes down, an older adult's world closes down that much more, too.

Small businesses are also important employers of older adults. When a business closes, employees lose their jobs. And older workers have a much harder time than younger people to get another job quickly. Nationally, half of small business owners are age 50 and above. So business closures threaten the economic security of older people and decrease their contributions to their communities as business owners and workers.

The 65+ population of this city is projected to grow by more than 230,000 people. Already there are more New Yorkers age 65 and above than there are children under the age of 16. This means that making this city a better

place to be older should be a top priority. And part of making New York more age-friendly is preserving more of the small businesses that employ older adults and are touchstones that allow all New Yorkers to age more comfortably in their neighborhoods.

This is not about preserving neighborhoods in amber or stopping the continual change that is part of the dynamic of the city. It is about being more thoughtful about what we value about our neighborhoods. It is about rebalancing the value of cherished places to the residents of neighborhoods with the financial interests of property owners. Ability to pay rent should not be the ultimate measure of whether a business adds value to a neighborhood. For the older adults who are often the longest-term residents of our neighborhoods, these businesses have value as crucial nodes in their social webs.

Therefore, we support Int. 1796-2019. We support balancing the desire of landowners to seek value with preserving the value of longtime businesses to the residents who have long called their neighborhoods home.