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BY Corey B. Bearak

The NYC Department for the Aging's (DFTA) plans to restructure how the city delivers services to the elderly will affect not only seniors themselves but also their families, neighbors and friends. Queens Civic Congress is mindful that Queens has the highest concentration of elderly of any of New York City's boroughs. Queens is also the largest borough, which in itself presents a challenge to seniors.

DFTA's plans to restructure its programs for our aging neighbors are troubling. Queens Civic Congress is not convinced that the agency's promises of saving money by adopting the Bronx model of weekly delivery of bulk frozen meals to homebound seniors will save money, or more important, appropriately substitute for the daily interaction with a meals deliverer.



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Queens Civic Congress understands that the Bronx pilot has resulted in annual savings of less than \$200,000 (pennies per meal) and still does not deliver customized meals to clients with special medical or cultural requirements. This lack of cultural and ethnic sensitivity could deter participation in the program when meals provide a crucial connection to isolated seniors who otherwise may receive no social services, which they may need (and qualify for).

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.

DFTA must disclose its plans to provide transportation to Queens seniors - many of whom are isolated by the very size of the borough and the dearth of reliable public transportation.

DFTA's plans to transform how the city cares for its aging population proceeds without a coherent transition plan. At minimum, Queens Civic Congress urges DFTA to slow down the process.

In addition, it can and must consult with the larger community: civic groups, community boards and local faith based institutions.

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