



# Queens Civic Congress

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May 27, 2008

Mr. Edwin Mendez-Santiago, LCSW  
Commissioner, Department for the Aging  
2 Lafayette Street  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Mendez-Santiago:

Thank you for your May 23 response (to my March 14 letter) concerning the NYC Department for the Aging's plans to restructure how the City delivers services to the elderly. Your letter outlines laudable goals in the area of making seniors healthy and ensuring that each senior gets the services they need. Unfortunately, the implementation plan, absent significant changes works more as a penny wise/ dollar foolish plan that guarantees too many senior will not access the services they need and many more will not be reached under the proposed service models. As I stated more than two months ago, the changes – note the emphasis on “changes” as opposed to “reforms” – “will affect not only seniors themselves but also their families, neighbors and friends.” Queens Civic Congress calls on DFTA – and communicates this same message to State and City electeds officials – to delay the proposed RFPs on senior centers and Meals on Wheels (MOW) pending further discussions that ensure that Queens – with the highest concentration of elderly of any of New York City's boroughs – as well as the entire city – suffers no consequences from changes that still make no sense in relations to the stated goals of wellness and service improvements.

The Bronx model for MOW leaves seniors out of the loop and its lack of ethnic and cultural sensitivity in our diverse city moves DFTA backwards rather than forward when it comes to meaningful outreach. A meaningful delay allows DFTA and senior services providers to devise models that perpetuate cultural and ethnic sensitivities and partners stronger agencies with those connected to their communities but in need of some level of strengthening. You seemed to ignore my important point that any “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).”

As Queens Civic Congress testified to the State Assembly on The reorganization of the case management service, begun on April 1, irresponsibly saddled new contractors with much larger caseloads than were reflected in the service plans of the RFPs; this after the fact caseload increase reflects a reverse cost- overrun. But, instead of just cheating taxpayers, it cheats clients the new RFPs promised to serve at a much greater capacity than the after-the-fact caseloads reasonably allow.

Critical comments by Queens Civic Congress and Queens Community Board 8 fail to appear on the DFTA website discussion of its so-called concept papers. These critical omissions strongly suggest a NYC Department for the Aging afraid to expose the truth; that the plan – essentially a

scheme as proposed – to save a few pennies on the backs of one of our populations with special needs – fails to meet the needs of our seniors and thus the needs of our city. DFTA needs to hear from – and heed – the larger community: such communication must be consistent with clear indicators of the interest and concerns of our older community residents, seniors’ families, civic groups, community boards and elected officials.

I write not just from a civic perspective but as a board member with over two decades of experience at leading senior agencies in my home borough and expertise in public policy including more than two decades in municipal policy and budget. DFTA's miscalculations in the case management contracts which imposed higher caseloads on under-resourced senior providers offers just a hint of the chaos New Yorkers must endure if DFTA's plans proceed without the intelligent reforms that remain necessary.

Queens Civic Congress expects City elected officials to use the budget process to stop DFTA's runaway train. The Congress also supports pending state legislation, A.10470, and recently reached out to Queens Senators to move this initiative to make DFTA take stock and proceed with care rather than reckless abandon that characterizes its current program.

Sincerely,

*Corey Bearak*

Corey B. Bearak  
President

c.: Mayor Michael Bloomberg  
Queens Borough President Helen Marshall  
Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo  
City Council Members  
State Assembly Members  
State Senators  
Council of Senior Centers and Services

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