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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services, Inc.**

**New York State Senate**

**Honorable Brian Kavanagh, Chair Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction and  
Community Development**

**Honorable Roxanne Persaud, Chair Senate Standing Committee on Social Services**

Submitted by Katie Foley, Director, Public Affairs  
February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Thank you to Committee Chairs Kavanagh and Persaud and the members of the committees for the opportunity to testify about issues related to homelessness, housing insecurity, affordable housing, and propose legislative remedies.

Selfhelp was founded in 1936 to help those fleeing Nazi Germany maintain their independence and dignity as they struggled to forge new lives in America. Today, Selfhelp has grown into one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area, with 46 programs throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. We provides a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year, while remaining the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America. Selfhelp offers a complete network of community-based home care, social service, and senior housing with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Our services are rooted in the idea that all individuals deserve to age with independence and dignity. Our services include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; eleven affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; four intensive case management programs; five senior centers; home health care and home health aide training; client centered technology programs including the Virtual Senior Center; two court-appointed guardianship programs; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and the provider for New York Connects in Queens.

We are focused on helping New Yorkers age with independence and dignity. Our affordable housing portfolio offers New Yorkers the opportunity to live in their own home while accessing the services they need as they age. In all of our developments, we engage with community partners, healthcare providers, and the residents provide high-quality housing plus services for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers.

## Selfhelp Realty Group

Since 1963, Selfhelp has been building affordable housing. Today, Selfhelp Community Services is a major provider of affordable housing for seniors in New York City and on Long Island. Our housing portfolio includes twelve affordable apartment developments, comprising of 14 buildings located in Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Long Island, which house over 1,400 low- and moderate-income senior residents in attractive, functional apartments with supportive services as needed.

To accommodate the growing number of older New Yorkers who need affordable housing and would benefit from remaining independent in their own homes, we are committed to developing new affordable housing in New York. Current developments include:

- Hunters Point South, Queens, NY: Selfhelp was awarded the Hunters Point Parcel C project with TF Cornerstone (TFC), a 1,200 unit, 2-building project, comprised of 800 units of affordable housing, of which 100 units are designated for senior affordable housing. Selfhelp will provide services to the seniors, and is involved in the design of the building to assure its compliance with our standards for senior living.
- Bergen Place, Freeport, Long Island, NY: Construction is expected to begin in mid 2020 for a 44 unit building, which is being designed by Studio Libeskind.
- 11 Park Drive, Wyandanch, Long Island, NY: In partnership with The Albanese Organization, Selfhelp will develop an affordable senior residence as part of the Wyandanch Rising 40-acre redevelopment, anchored by the Wyandanch LIRR train station.
- Sumner Houses, Brooklyn, NY: As part of NYC's Seniors First plan, Selfhelp was awarded land by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to develop a senior building on one of its existing public housing properties, Sumner Houses, in Brooklyn. We are partnering with the RiseBoro, Urban Builders Collaborative and Lettire Construction on this development. The building will have approximately 200 units and will have a community facility open to the entire Sumner complex.

## SHASAM (Selfhelp's Active Services for Aging Model)

We know that housing plus services is the right model to ensure that seniors are able to thrive as they age in their communities. Selfhelp's unique real estate model brings together safe and affordable apartments with our legacy of quality social services.

At each building, we offer service coordination through SHASAM (Selfhelp's Active Services for Aging Model), which makes available social work services, education, and recreation, as well as access to skilled nursing and home care, if and when requested by the resident. The goal of SHASAM is to provide the appropriate level of assistance to allow older adults to remain in their apartments and not move to more costly settings such as assisted living or nursing homes. Recent research shows that access to SHASAM allows older adults to reduce their chances of being hospitalized and/or visiting an emergency room which reduced their overall Medicaid and/or Medicare costs.

### Affordable Senior Housing as a Tool for Healthcare and Social Service Delivery

Selfhelp believes that the best outcomes for older adults are achieved when social services support health. We know that service coordinators within affordable senior housing, such as SHASAM, can reduce healthcare costs and keep seniors healthier at home. By bringing health and social services together in policy making and funding decisions, we can improve the outcomes for older adults throughout New York State.

Importantly, research on Selfhelp's service coordination model shows that low-cost interventions have a significant impact on health. The SHASAM model of services would result in significant savings to the State's Medicaid program by preventing or lowering costs of emergency room visits and keeping low-income seniors out of costlier levels of care, such as assisted living or nursing homes. A New York-based study, conducted by Dr. Michael Gusmano of Rutgers University, compared Selfhelp residents with access to resident assistants to a comparison group of seniors in the same zip codes without this support. The published research shows that residents of Selfhelp's housing are healthier than their neighbors who do not live in high-quality housing.

Research show that residents in Selfhelp's affordable housing had:

- 68% lower odds of Selfhelp residents being hospitalized
- \$1,778 average Medicaid payment per person, per hospitalization for Selfhelp residents, versus \$5,715 for the comparison group
- 53% lower odds of a Selfhelp resident visiting an emergency room compared to a non-Selfhelp resident

The full report is available through the Journal for Health Affairs (the article is available upon request), and a white paper published by Selfhelp is available at [www.selfhelp.net](http://www.selfhelp.net).

### Legislative Proposal

We urge the State to pass legislation and dedicate funding to create a senior housing resident coordinator program. In coordination with LeadingAge NY, Enterprise Community Partners, LiveOn NY, and other housing providers and advocates, Selfhelp supports a \$10 million allocation over five years to establish funding for social workers in new and existing affordable senior housing. Service coordination includes an array of services that assist residents to remain independent by emphasizing wellness and healthy aging. This \$10 million investment through the Affordable Independent Senior Housing Assistance Program would be used in conjunction with New York's historic commitment of \$125 million in senior housing, and would create a very cost-effective model for seniors to age in their own homes, avoid more costly institutional care, and result in savings for Medicaid, which is especially key this year in the context of the work of the MRT.

### Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the 20,000 clients we serve, I am grateful for the Assembly's support for affordable housing. For further questions, I can be reached at [kfoley@selfhelp.net](mailto:kfoley@selfhelp.net) or 212-971-7605.