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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services  
New York City Council  
FY21 Aging Committee Hearing Public Testimony  
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My name is Katie Foley and I am the Managing Director of External Relations and Communications at Selfhelp Community Services. Thank you to Aging Committee Chair Margaret Chin, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

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 program locations throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. We provide 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 programs with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; eleven affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three intensive case management programs; five senior centers including one of New York City's first Innovative Senior Centers; home health care; client centered technology programs including the Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and New York Connects, which provides seniors and people with disabilities with the information and support they need to remain living independently in their own homes.

We are grateful for the Council's long standing and ongoing support for so many important senior programs and for always emphasizing the needs of older adults in policy decisions and budget allocations. With strong community based programs, we are confident that older New Yorkers will be able to access the care and support they deserve and need to be able to age in their own homes and communities.



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During the COVID-19 pandemic, Selfhelp has continued to serve our 20,000 elderly and vulnerable clients through our range of home and community-based programs. Our home health aides have been provided much needed at-home care, our frontline staff have been caring for individuals in the Community Guardian Program, and all of our social workers from our community-based programs, including case management, have been checking on their clients by phone, email, or Zoom to ensure access to food, safe shelter, medical care, and more. We have quickly expanded our Virtual Senior Center to include members of Selfhelp's senior centers, NORCs, Case Management, and Housing in order to reduce social isolation among our clients. Our team is working every day to ensure our clients continue to live with dignity through this challenging time.

In today's testimony, I will focus on Selfhelp's experience helping our clients access home delivered meals. We recognize that the need for home delivered meals has significantly increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. We anticipate that the increased need for meals will continue throughout the 2020-2021 winter. We are appreciative that the Mayor established the GetFoodNYC program which has increased access to home delivered meals. We also recognize the unique challenges home delivered meals providers, our non-profit colleagues, have faced during the pandemic especially uncertain funding amidst serving a rapidly increasing homebound population.

We recognize that the pandemic caused a number of challenges for everyone, including our partners in government, and we do appreciate the City's quick action in March as the pandemic hit New York City. As a case management provider in parts of Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn, our experience has varied widely in terms of meal availability, reliability, and quality of home delivered meals. Our case managers have helped our clients navigate wait lists, inconsistent delivery schedules, and frequent renewal applications.

Below I've outlined details of our experience that we want to share with the Committee:

- Our clients and older adults across New York City deserve nutritious and quality meals. Before the COVID pandemic, our clients were able to access quality hot meals every day. Since the start of the pandemic however, the availability of hot meals has decreased, and deliveries became infrequent. We have seen a significant decrease in the quality and appropriateness of the food being delivered. Hot meals have become much more limited as deliveries change from once/day to a more infrequent schedule. We've submitted feedback on behalf of our clients about the quality of the frozen meals via the online communication system.



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- Each person deserves food that is appropriate for their needs. We've had bedbound clients receive uncooked pasta that requires standing at a stove to cook, or boxes of food left in the lobby of a building waiting for the client to carry back to their apartment. It is imperative that the notes in each person's application be followed so that the food delivered is appropriate to their needs.
- The inconsistent and changing delivery schedules have made food access an ongoing source of stress and anxiety for our clients. Another consequence of inconsistent food delivery is staff time. Our case managers spend a disproportionate amount of time coordinating and following up on delivery issues.
- While the GetFoodNYC online referral form has been easy for our case managers to navigate, there are limited details about the types of available food. If possible, it is preferred for case managers to be able to communicate directly with the food vendor to resolve issues, discuss meal options, and provide details about client's needs.
- Unfortunately one of our case management programs was only given two logins for a team of over 20 people. When we requested addition logins for each staff person we were only granted two additional. It's important for all of our case managers to have equal access to the online referral system in order to be efficient and serve as many clients as possible, especially as we coordinate our client care while working remotely during the COVID pandemic.
- A challenge for our case managers is the need to renew each client's food delivery every two weeks. One team has over 100 clients they need to renew every two weeks requires a significant amount of staff time to track and resubmit these requests. We respectfully request that the renewal period be extended by months in order to maximize efficiency.
- We recognize that DFTA is currently considering how to re-open senior center kitchens to provide meals to members. These meals will be a welcome addition to the options for older adults, but it will not replace the need for consistent hot meal delivery for homebound adults. The need for meals is great and should be continued even when there's a phased reopening of senior centers. Even when centers are open, due to social distancing, lunch service capacity will be much smaller than before, but the need for additional meal options will continue.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on Selfhelp's experience accessing home delivered meals for our homebound clients. Food security is a priority for our staff and clients during this challenging time and we anticipate that the need will only grow during the winter ahead.



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## Conclusion

Selfhelp is grateful to the City Council for always emphasizing the needs of older adults in policy decisions and budget allocations. We are also grateful to the Mayor's Office, DFTA, and the Council for their work to ensure that our City's most vulnerable are well cared for during the pandemic. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. On behalf of the 20,000 clients we serve, I am grateful for the Council's support on so many important programs.



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