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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services
Queens Borough Board
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My name is Katie Foley and I am the Managing Director, External Affairs and Communications at Selfhelp Community Services. Thank you to Queens Borough Board for holding a virtual hearing to learn about the ongoing needs of the Queens community.

Last year, we served 20,000 individuals, with approximately 14,000 in Queens. Selfhelp offers robust services to Queens residents, including: two case management programs, friendly visiting for older adults, seven senior affordable housing, home care, specialized services to Holocaust survivors, four NORCs, five senior centers, New York Connects provider, social adult day program for adults with Alzheimer's, Virtual Senior Center, and more. We are grateful for the support of our elected officials in the past, and look forward to working together this year to support programs that help people age with dignity and independence.

Selfhelp Community Services is a non-profit serving 20,000 older and vulnerable adults each year through home health care, affordable housing, and skilled social services, while remaining the largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors in North America. 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 offers a complete network of [home care](#) and [community-based services](#) with the overarching goal of helping seniors live with dignity and independence and avoid institutionalization.

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 provided much needed at-home care and all of our social workers from our community-based programs have been checking on their clients by phone or Zoom to ensure access to food, safe shelter, medical care, and more. We have expanded and enhanced our Virtual Senior Center. Our team is working every day to ensure our clients continue to live with dignity through this challenging time.

Today I will highlight three areas of need within the Selfhelp community.

Senior Transportation Program: Selfhelp is seeking to expand our established transportation program that provides free round-trip transportation to medical appointments for seniors living in Queens. Before the COVID pandemic we were seeing the need for transportation growing each year. The pandemic has significantly increased the need for safe, private transportation options for older adults.

This program includes offering transportation to vaccine appointments and we expect to serve many seniors this winter and spring who need assistance getting to and from their vaccination site. Due to the demand for accessible transportation and popularity of this program we believe that there is a need for increased funding for transportation programs.

Based on feedback received by individuals who benefitted from the program, as well as the demand for services, we know that the program improves quality of life for older New Yorkers, as it eliminates concerns about transportation costs, traveling alone, and navigating public transit. Further, in transportation deserts in parts of NYC and Queens in particular, this program removed a significant barrier for older adults in caring for their health.

Specialized services to Holocaust survivors have been our legacy for 85 years. This year we expanded our **Witness Theater** program into Queens. We look forward to sharing this unique program with the Queens community this spring in honor of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Witness Theater is an innovative inter-generational program bringing together Holocaust survivors and teenagers to elicit, expose and memorialize the moving stories of survival. Through a guided drama therapy process, group members explore issues of war, loss and trauma while at the same time forming deep and meaningful relationships that dissolve the barriers between generations. The project culminates in a staged production: the students portray the personal experiences of the group's survivors, while the survivors narrate their own stories. The public is invited to view this virtual performance and I personally invite all attending today to watch on Selfhelp's Facebook and YouTube channels. I speak from personal experience when I say that is a powerful and moving experience to watch teenagers portray the experiences of the Holocaust survivors.

For seniors who are homebound—particularly during the current COVID pandemic—Selfhelp's **Virtual Senior Center (VSC)** is a vital source of face-to-face social interaction by allowing participants to join interactive live classes and peer-to-peer chats. With the ongoing recommendation for older adults to remain at home except for essential errands, many seniors have a new interest in virtual social interaction and community and we believe the VSC should become a permanent part of the city's infrastructure to support older adults.

Developed ten years ago, the Virtual Senior Center (VSC) has been a trailblazer in combating social isolation. We believe that the Virtual Senior Center can become a lifeline for the thousands of vulnerable older New Yorkers both during and after the COVID pandemic.

Older adults use a personal computer or tablet to log into the Virtual Senior Center for daily interactive classes. Classes are offered in English, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Korean. Margo's story explains the importance of the VSC: *Margo is a member of our Benjamin Rosenthal Prince Street Innovative Senior Center, who is now participating in the VSC. Though she misses her Senior Center friends and the activities she enjoyed there, she is grateful to be able to fill her schedule with classes from our Virtual Senior Center.*

Thank you to the members of the Queens Borough Board for the opportunity to testify.