

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK



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***CITING RISING NUMBER OF
WOMEN AGING INTO POVERTY,
COUNCIL MEMBERS CHIN AND
ROSENTHAL CALL FOR MORE
FUNDING FOR DFTA AND MORE
AFFORDABLE SENIOR HOUSING***

NEW YORK –In a joint hearing on Wednesday, **Council Members Margaret S. Chin** and **Helen Rosenthal** addressed an ongoing but, often unseen, crisis facing women as they age. Through the testimony of activists, experts, and representatives from the NYC Department for the Aging and the Commission on Gender Equity, the City Council was provided with a vivid and disturbing picture of the numerous economic challenges facing older women in New York City. A full video of the hearing can be watched [here](#).

Older adults are New York City's fastest growing population. From 2005 to 2015, the number of adults over age 65 in New York City increased from about 947,000 to 1.13 million — a nearly 20 percent jump. The majority (60%) of older adults in New York are women, and many of those women are struggling.

Access to affordable and safe housing is a key issue for older women living on fixed incomes. Currently, the demand for subsidized senior housing far outpaces supply. Women comprise the majority of severely rent-burdened households not receiving any form of housing assistance in New York City and, as a result, more women are experiencing homelessness for the first time as older adults.

As women age, decades of pay inequity, uncompensated (and unrecognized) work as caregivers, comparatively higher health care and transportation costs, as well as myriad other factors contribute to their increased risk of poverty. The numbers are stark; 17% of women over age 65 in NYC are poor, compared to only 12% of men over 65. What's more, women face higher rates of poverty as they age. By the time women reach their 80s, almost one-in-four are living in poverty.

Women tend to rely on Social Security Income far more than their male counterparts, compounding their financial vulnerability. Yet women typically draw less from SSI and other retirement plans due to a lifetime of salary inequity, as well as significant periods of time outside the workforce in order to care for children and/or elderly family members.

“A comprehensive assessment of the needs of our growing population of older women is urgently required,” argued **Council Member Chin, Chair of the Committee on Aging**. “The problem impacts all women, but the challenges are greater for women in vulnerable groups, such as women of color, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer women, and immigrant women. The City will need to ramp up investment in affordable senior housing and increase funding for DFTA's Senior Centers, caseworkers, and mental health services. These actions will help, but the bottom line is that we will need a comprehensive strategy to address what is a comprehensive problem. ”

“As Chair of the Committee on Women, I have held a number of hearings that highlight the impact that gender imbalance and discrimination have on women, especially women of color and women who identify as LGBTQ+,” said **Council Member Rosenthal**. “At today's hearing, we investigated how the status quo fails vast numbers of women

throughout their lives, and how this failure contributes to the tragedy of a large and growing number of older women aging into poverty. As a city, we can do so much better. Today's hearing was a first step toward building a city-wide consensus that older adult women deserve to age with dignity and security.”

“We have known for years that a gender pay gap exists, and therefore it should not be a surprise that aging women have a greater chance of living in poverty in New York City,” said Council Member Debi Rose, a member of the Committee on Aging. “Pay inequities snowball over time, affecting retirement and pension levels, and creating economic, social and health disparities. What is even more disturbing is learning that there has been limited research on older adult women in the City. I thank my colleagues for holding an oversight hearing on this topic, and I hope that together, we shine greater light on a problem that this City needs to be working harder to solve.”

“Ageism continues to be a major systemic cause of poverty in older adults,” said **The Radical Age Movement’s Executive Director, Alice Fisher**. “Older women face the additional challenge of sexism. My organization looks forward to working with the City Council to combat both these issues. The time has come to call for age justice.”

The crisis of older female poverty will continue to grow unabated if New York City does not begin to address it now. DFTA and other relevant City agencies will need to work closely together in order to provide a comprehensive solution to this truly complex issue. Likewise, the City Council will need to serve as a partner to these agencies by introducing legislation and funding initiatives which can help provide older women with the assistance they need.

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