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B E F O R E :

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President of the City Council of the  
City of New York

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Stein.

MR. STEIN: I want to thank everybody for coming.

I'm going to read a very brief statement, and then I'll start with our hearing.

The way older Hispanics are neglected by New York is shameful. Tens of thousands of elderly Hispanic people in this city are living in substandard housing and scraping by on one meal a day. They are poor and vulnerable. They have worked in low-paying jobs that have no pensions, and because of language and cultural barriers, they are virtually isolated from services like Social Security and federal housing assistance.

Older Hispanic New Yorkers have been taken for granted. In fact, this is one of the first hearings of its kind to examine the problem and begin to work towards solutions.

Stereotypes about Hispanic culture lead us to believe that extended families shun government services and care for their own elderly. It's just not true.

One of our witnesses will say that she

1  
2 is the main support for her son, who is a drug  
3 addict. His infrequent income has been used  
4 against her, and she is unable to get into  
5 public housing.

6 In cases where families do look out for  
7 their ~~needs~~ they ~~often live doubled up~~  
8 ~~in small, crowded apartments~~ use they do  
9 not know about the services available to  
10 parents and grandparents.

11 Statistics illustrate the extent to  
12 which older Hispanic New Yorkers are kept  
13 uninformed about entitlements. For example,  
14 66-percent of people eligible for Supplemental  
15 Security Insurance are not enrolled. Of that  
16 number, one quarter say they never heard of  
17 SSI.

18 Clearly, language is the main barrier  
19 to getting services. We need more  
20 Spanish-speaking workers at Social Security  
21 offices and government agencies that deal with  
22 the elderly.

23 We also need more active outreach to  
24 the community. We've got to get the word out,  
25 perhaps through Spanish public service

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announcements on radio and television, to older adult Hispanics that services are, in fact, available.

We cannot allow an insensitive bureaucracy to thwart the chance for a better life for older Hispanic New Yorkers. Demographics show that Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in in city. We must help the people who have contributed so much to cultural and economic life of this city.

I would like to introduce now Sara Vidal.

MS. VIDAL: Yes, our first panel will be Edwin Mendez-Santiago, Executive Director of RAICES, and follow up, Paula Roman.

MR. STEIN: Thank you very much for coming.

MR. SANTIAGO: Thank you.

I want to begin by thanking you for this opportunity, because I think you're correct, as you began your introduction, that the needs of the Hispanic elderly community have been ignored, neglected, by our City

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agencies and other agencies that provide services to the elderly. And this is one of the few forums that have been organized to examine this issue.

So I would hope that as we speak today that we see this as the beginning of a process to continue to improve the situation for the Hispanic elderly.

I, for one -- and I don't recognize all the people as they're here, but I think it's indicative of the situation that even with your office's involvement and the press release that it sent out, and I know there are other things happening in the city today, but part of that neglect is to see how this is not an interesting enough issue for New York's media to report on. And I think that's one of the problems that we have to look at.

In preparing my written testimony, which you have copies of, and I won't read, because I want to give the opportunity to Mrs. Paula Roman, one of the seniors that we brought, to, in her own words, share with you her frustrations in trying to get services in

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this city.

But what I would like to share with you that, again, the neglect of the Hispanic elderly is something that we can't allow to continue.

The media is looking, I think, for issues such as what's happened recently. We see the crisis and that your office has been in the vanguard of trying to highlight the crisis in our City hospital system.

And my worry is that we not wait until one of our seniors has to die in a dramatic fashion before we create some interest in this issue, because unfortunately Mr. Stein, many of our seniors are dying. It's just that not too many people are giving a damn about it.

And we don't have people who may have the connections that the unfortunate senior, who was a senior that died in Harlem Hospital within the last few days has to create some attention, but every day, when our senior citizens are being mistreated, ignored and neglected, it's something that has been allowed to happen, is continuing to happen, is

1  
2 happening as we speak, but no one is paying  
3 attention to it, besides your office, on this  
4 day, and the few Latino advocacy organizations  
5 that are here today. Very few other people  
6 have cared about this population and have  
7 tried to highlight and do something to change  
8 our situation.

9 So we need in many ways to have this  
10 continue to be highlighted, and hopefully, the  
11 involvement of your office will be the first  
12 in many steps to improve the situation for the  
13 Hispanic elderly.

14 But I'd like to turn over the  
15 microphone now. I'll introduce her.

16 This is Miss Paula Roman, who is a  
17 senior citizen from Brooklyn, New York, who is  
18 sixty-seven years-old, and she will explain to  
19 you in her own words, in Spanish, which is  
20 also very typical of that age and that  
21 population, what some of her frustrations are  
22 in trying to secure services from the City.

23 MS. ROMAN: (Through translator.) Good  
24 morning. I'm Mrs. Paula Roman. I come from  
25 Brooklyn. I'm sixty-seven years old.

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The reason I am here is because my benefits have been denied to me. They told me that the seniors have been denied those benefits. I received a letter. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on which I live, [REDACTED] sold the house, and they wanted the house empty. I have to leave the house.

I have gone to several places for help, and yet I have been denied. Thanks to this program, RAICES, I went to them. They told me several things.

I don't know what to do, because I have an interview with Housing, but they, too, have not helped me.

I'm a single mother. I have ten children. And the nation has benefited, because they're all productive. I think I merit some type of positive consideration and attention.

I have a daughter who works in the Pentagon, and twenty years to retirement.

I have a son who has recently returned from the Gulf.

These are benefits that I have given to



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the nation. I think I deserve some attention.

I have never failed voting. I voted in all primaries and all general elections.

I need an apartment. I've gone to many programs in Brooklyn and submitted applications. ~~Applications always filled out~~  
~~on the side. I have never~~  
~~heard anything from them.~~

I am a sick person. I have heart problems, arthritis. I cannot go out alone. I also need a home attendant. They sent a young lady to me, but she only works three days. I cannot go out alone, because I get dizzy spells and anywhere I can easily faint. I cannot go out alone, because I forget things easily.

There are many things I've tried to get, unfortunately, but thank God to RAICES and to God, there are some things that are happening.

To Mrs. Cardona and her boss, thank you for that.

These are my words, thank you very much.

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2 MR. STEIN: Tell her she's a beautiful  
3 lady, and we're very honored that she was  
4 here, and what she told us is very helpful to  
5 improve the situation.

6 MR. SANTIAGO: If I could add to her  
7 statement, and I don't think anyone could be  
8 more eloquent, Mr. Stein.

9 I think she's a symbol of many of the  
10 problems that all of our organizations would  
11 like to highlight here today.

12 Unfortunately, in the system at large,  
13 there's a stigma that the Hispanic family  
14 is -- or a stereotype -- that the Hispanic  
15 family is following cultural traditions of  
16 helping its parents. Unfortunately, this, to  
17 a large extent, is no longer true. The family  
18 may be around, but is no longer able, as in  
19 many of our different ethnic groups, to take  
20 care of the individual to a hundred-percent of  
21 that person's needs.

22 Also, Miss Roman, I think, as you see,  
23 has paid her dues. She's been a productive  
24 member of society, her children have been  
25 productive members of society, but there's a

1  
2 stigma out there that older poor Hispanics are  
3 a burden on the system, that they're all on  
4 welfare and Medicaid and that they have it  
5 made. This is not true. People are put  
6 through such dehumanizing experiences.

7 For example, in Miss ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~, when  
8 we found her through Grass Roots Outreach, she  
9 is eligible for all these benefits. She had  
10 none of them. She had been to welfare, she  
11 had been to Medicaid, but had always been  
12 turned down. And it took an advocacy  
13 organization to go in and make sure that she  
14 had her benefits.

15 Even when we go through the system --  
16 and many of those bureaucracies have some  
17 criterias that are incredible. ~~We've had~~

18 ~~the Section 8, the only thing that we can do to~~  
19 ~~take Section 8, and we can't find any other~~  
20 ~~landlord that will take her Section 8~~

21 ~~Her Section 8 case has not been~~  
22 ~~paid due, and we're trying to get it extended~~

23 So one of the issues we're looking at  
24 is not only the ignorance of services, but  
25 that at times there aren't any services out

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there, but also what can we do to facilitate those services that are available to make them more accessible.

So why are landlords refusing to help her in any way? Her situation can dramatically improve.

She's eligible for Section 8 if a landlord say, "Fine we'll take it." I think it's a case of age discrimination and discrimination based on source of funds, that landlords are discriminating against elderly, because they're old and because they're getting their money from Section 8 for housing. That's something that your office, I think, needs to look at.

And I'll finish, because I know you have a lot of other expert witnesses.

But just again, using Miss Roman in a certain way as symbol, because she doesn't speak English does not mean that she's not intelligent. People assume in this society, unfortunately, because of racism, that older individuals, because there is ageism, and I

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know of your long advocacy in the field of gerontology, so you're aware that there is ageism out there.

What happens when we look at the -- you're combining ageism with racism and cultural insensitivity. Where people are looking at our elderly people and saying, old people are no good, but especially they're no good when we don't understand them and they don't speak English.

So it's one of the issues we need to look at, is making services accessible, not only to people that speak Spanish, but that understand the cultural context of the population attempting to be served.

As an example, RAICES, which is a Spanish word for roots, has been successful, because we're very sensitive to the roots of our community, our culture and our language.

The unfortunate thing is that in all of Brooklyn we're the only organization that has this capacity, and City-wide, there's only a handful of us there -- most of them are here as panelists in your hearing today.

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2           So the problem is that if our  
3 population is informed of services, where are  
4 they're going to go to?

5           So one of the other things I'd like to  
6 say before we leave is you're very aware and I  
7 know you're a staunch advocate for the  
8 elderly, that the budget crisis has led to  
9 cutbacks and reduction in services throughout  
10 the system.

11           Our concern is that Hispanics have  
12 never had their fair share, and that we need  
13 to make sure that in this time of fiscal  
14 constraints, Hispanic agencies, and those  
15 serving the Latino community, are held  
16 harmless from additional cuts that will  
17 devastate the few programs that are out there,  
18 serving this community.

19           MR. STEIN: If you have ~~any problem~~  
20 with ~~section 8~~, which you mentioned, please  
21 ~~call this gentleman on my right, Tony Riva~~  
22 because he has helped a lot of people with  
23 Section 8. And we'll give you his number.

24           We have some questions, but since we  
25 have many witnesses, I'm not going to ask

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them.

I think what you said is precisely right. First of all, the fact that the media, including the Latino media, you know, is not here, they have to wait for some sensational things, but the fact that so many thousands and thousands and thousands of Latinos and Hispanics in this city are suffering, and are getting sick, and are not getting the proper care and being discriminated against, nobody seems to be interested in that. It's really a shame.

We have to continue to make this an issue that cries out for redress. But I think you hit it right on the head as to the reason that combination of forces that you cited I think is exactly right.

So I want to thank you very much.

MR. SANTIAGO: Thank you, sir.

MS. VIDAL: Our second panel is, Suleika Cabrera-Drinane, founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Puerto Rican Hispanic Elderly. We're also calling Petra Allende, Delia Ortiz, and Selina Santiago.

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MR. STEIN: I want to thank all of you ladies for coming. Thank you very, very much.

MS. DRINANE: Good morning.

MR. STEIN: Good morning,

MS. DRINANE: Sorry we got delayed. But I'd like to first thank you.

I know the last time we spoke, we had to talk about discussions of some kind of forum, public hearing for the Hispanic elderly, and I really want to thank you, or congratulate you, for really following through with the hearing, especially at the time that there are many problems with the budget.

And I'm repeating some of the things he said, but I think that -- I know one of the things I was given was historical, and is a quick overview of some of the issues and problems that we've had, and some statistics with the Hispanic elderly. And I wanted to just let let you know I started in the field of aging in the '70's. Alice Brophy -- I think you remember Alice -- and I was just coming in The board of Ed, and there was no one -- and one of our goals was to advocacy,



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and really get the word out to our community.

The role that I had to do -- and you see I was very easily able to give you a quick view and now I've been rushing this morning, because we had two emergencies in the office.

But in the '70's, when we started, there was a less than one-percent of the elderly was Hispanic, and the majority of them were Puerto Ricans. And services that were around were really -- the older population was a non-Hispanic population.

And when we look at services that when we're talking about programs and availability of the monies in the '70's, and monies were coming into the City, we weren't around. We didn't exist, and therefore, rightly so, the monies went to organizations like the Golden Age Club, like the Catholic Charities, that had senior populations, and organizations that were providing services to the older population, and I have no problems with that.

As we age, and one of the things that when we were -- also, we did not have a Hispanic staff in the Department of Aging

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2 providing programatic service. It they had  
3 somebody in Fiscal. And our advocacy was  
4 simple, was to really translate information to  
5 get it into the Hispanic community, to get the  
6 information out to the total community at  
7 large that there were services, and that in  
8 spite of that, some of the elderly live with  
9 their families, that information had to be  
10 communicated with.

11 The other aspect of it was that when  
12 we're talking -- we were able to get,  
13 particularly I would say with Alice Brophy,  
14 particularly, and together with other groups,  
15 we were able to get the Department for the  
16 Aging to fund three or four programs, for  
17 example, Mohican Plaza, Sunset Park Senior  
18 Citizens Center, Crotona Program for the  
19 Elderly, and -- contact, and then we were also  
20 able to get -- at that point, benevolent  
21 association programs, Hispanic-sponsored and  
22 Hispanic-run programs.

23 So as our population grew, and doubled  
24 and quadrupled, the '70's to the '80's, monies  
25 did not. We started getting into a deficit,

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started getting into existing programs.

We were able to participate in some money, but when you look at what was going on -- and maybe I should talk about some of the issues and problems -- when you looked at the population, it was growing quickly, and when you looked at the dramatic increase in the numbers of the very old, and you looked at the very young minority elderly, Hispanic elderly, they weren't getting the services.

So, we come right now to the present, in the '90's, and we're talking about a population, recognizing the problems of the population in terms of income, in terms of health, that when you look at statistics, the 1990's, and we look at statistics of income, that when you take the Hispanic older person, that 70-percent of the elderly Hispanic older persons make \$10,000 a year, less than \$10,000 a year. And 30-percent -- when half of the Hispanic older persons in the households make \$5,000, less than \$5,000 a year, those are really drastic figures.

MR. STEIN: Half of the Hispanic

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elderly households make less than \$5,000 a year?

MS. DRINANE: Yes. And nearly 70-percent had income less than \$10,000 a year.

So [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] on  
[REDACTED] 1. We're talking about a population that, if we're not careful, it's going to be poorer when they get older, because you looked at the poverty within the Latino children, and even take the statistics, the statistics of the black male at fifty-five years-old that was compared, his poverty was compared to Bangladesh, so you can imagine the Hispanic older person, the Hispanic male, I would say is in a very similar situation.

So when you look at the income, and also, when you looked at in the '70's, there was a minimum income, people could retire and take Social Security at minimum income which now doesn't exist. When you look at the present time in terms that in the year 2000,

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2 starting in the year 2000 -- I think it's  
3 2010 -- the age is being raised. And you look  
4 at our life expectancy, we're getting worse.

5 So there's recommendations, and I have  
6 recommendations regarding some of the  
7 issues -- and I know I'm taking time. And  
8 what I'll do is I'll get all the statistical  
9 matters that we have and some of the examples  
10 that we have within our agency.

11 MR. STEIN: Compared to what?

12 MS. DRINANE: Compared to the national  
13 norm, which the trends are the same, you know,  
14 the lowest income, the level of education, and  
15 yet we're not focusing on poverty. And I  
16 think that we have to focus on the total  
17 population of the impact of AIDS in our  
18 community and the stresses, and we also have  
19 to focus on, you know, we were talking about  
20 monies, and Ed was talking about access points  
21 and what's happening with access points, and  
22 what's happening to our institutions providing  
23 services.

24 If we don't do something to improve the  
25 infrastructures of our organizations, they're

1  
2 not going to exist. That means that as we  
3 continue, we're the last ones to come into the  
4 programs, and the first ones to be cut. And I  
5 have to congratulate Commissioner Davis  
6 because she really took into consideration  
7 some of the minority aspect in terms of the  
8 monies and the impact of cuts on our  
9 institutions.

10 Then we have to really look and see how  
11 we can get monies to really institutionalize  
12 our organizations.

13 And the other aspect is that minority  
14 programs, we have senior citizen centers right  
15 now, and those senior citizen centers are --  
16 consolidation plan, and I know that the  
17 department is targeting the minority  
18 organizations.

19 One concern that I have is that now  
20 that, hopefully, we'll have more Hispanic  
21 sponsors and programs, directed programs, that  
22 these programs have enough monies to be able  
23 to survive and to not become failures, because  
24 there's not enough money to operate them  
25 effectively.

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I'll put my over recommendations --  
I'll give them to you, so that I don't take  
more time

MR. STEIN: Can we hear from the  
folks?

MS. ALLENDE: My name is Petra Allende.  
I'm a resident of East Harlem.

I'm a volunteer in a couple different  
senior centers, East Harlem Senior Services  
Council for Senior Centers in East Harlem. --  
for which I volunteer my time in order to help  
some of the seniors who have particular  
problems.

Some of the problems that my seniors  
have been facing is that some of them have  
very poor housing conditions. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We don't have access to health  
services, we don't have access to benefits.  
And when we have to struggle in order to send  
them and see that someone could help, we refer  
them to certain agencies. Due to the fact  
that it's not enough personnel to deal with

1  
2 their problems, some of the people with those  
3 attitudes -- Puerto Rican and Hispanic  
4 elderly -- we have to see which way we could  
5 change one way or the other.

6 We have been suffering because some of  
7 our seniors, like she has specified, the  
8 income -- some of them are receiving SSI  
9 monies. And you know the most that SSI give  
10 to one senior is \$4,700 a year or \$470 a  
11 month, or \$4,500, \$4,600, or they  
12 supplement -- supplementation of their Social  
13 Security, which they receive \$200 Social  
14 Security, and the balance, \$230 or \$225 on  
15 SSI.

16 So that's not enough money in order for  
17 them to qualify for certain housing.

18 MR. STEIN: Do you think that language  
19 is one big problem as to why many Hispanic  
20 seniors don't get what is available to them?

21 MS. ALLENDE: Yes, because it's more  
22 easy for a person who all his life has been  
23 speaking Spanish to communicate his problems  
24 in Spanish to another person who could  
25 understand them. I think that's one of the



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main reasons why we could deal with that.

Right now you have -- I congratulate you, because you have some personnel in your office which are Spanish-speaking people, and relate to us, and we know that if we called, some of them will come to the phone and communicate with us in Spanish.

Another thing is that we need to look into the meals. You know that we in East Harlem suffer the way we've had cuts. We have seniors who take part of their lunches to their home, in order to stretch for dinner in the afternoon.

We have homebound people who are not receiving the services, the proper services. Sometimes when they are expecting that the worker came in the morning, she called that she cannot make it, or she don't show up, and they have to wait a couple of days for the replacement. They go on vacation.

I wish that you could look into those matters.

Another thing that we have is that ~~the~~

~~of the office and we are looking on~~

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[REDACTED] Housing Authority, are very proud of our [REDACTED]. We are talking about isolation of the seniors.

If a senior is isolated -- sometimes they have friends who come and visit their apartment. If a person comes to your home and somebody complains that you are receiving personnel, they immediately send a note, and they have to hold them for a hearing. Sometimes it's in those hearings, they don't have no one who can translate to them. They say that they will be penalized, and some of them, they have been saying that [REDACTED] have to [REDACTED] the apartment.

I think we have to look into those things. I think some of the rules and regulations are the ones that have stopped us from receiving services.

I would like to thank you.

MR. STEIN: Thank you very much.

You've been very helpful.

MS. DIAZ: My name is Angela Diaz.

Thirty-seven years I stay here.

(Speaking in Spanish.)

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MR. STEIN: Tell her she's doing very well.

MS. SANTIAGO: This lady, she have been working about thirty-seven years in this country.

My name is Elena Santiago. I'm a Hispanic access specialist.

This lady, she has been collecting Social Security, and her income is \$356, and she didn't know nothing about SSI, Social Security supplementary.

So one of her friends brought her to the Office for Institute for the Hispanic, and when I checked, her only income is \$356. And for the first time she's going to receive SSI, after twenty years, because there was a lack of information.

Those people don't have the information needed for them to look for the services.

MR. PABON: How long was she going on without surviving on SSI?

MS. SANTIAGO: For over twenty years.

For the first time, she says do I, yes. And then I checked with the Social Security

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office, and they said yes, that's all she received.

She's eighty-eight years old.

MR. STEIN: God bless her.

MS. SANTIAGO: And she has books that she has written, poems, beautiful books in Spanish.

MR. STEIN: She has written poetry?

MS. SANTIAGO: Yes. I have one of them.

Okay, I would like to speak of the problems of the case worker. I always have to hear all the problems, because we service Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Bronx, so we have a hotline. And housing -- the biggest problem for our seniors is housing. Because now, with the priorities they are giving to the homeless, there's no call for apartments for our seniors.

Thank God that I have a contact with two different agencies that have been giving me apartments from private developments.

And one thing that I would like to emphasize is that, for example, the Catholic

1  
2 agencies; okay, they have apartments, but they  
3 tell --they have a lot of -- But you know  
4 don't what number you are in the lotto,  
5 because you ask them, and they won't tell you.  
6 They pick the ones that they want.

7 Another one is, for example, the other  
8 ~~private developments, for example, in~~  
9 Roosevelt Island. I went there because people  
10 apply, but they are not given numbers. ~~the~~  
11 ~~just put one~~ ~~and the~~ ~~the~~  
12 ~~people~~.

13 And the Hispanics, ~~the~~

14 ~~up to now that they were~~

15 Like, for example, the Section 8.  
16 Section 8, beautiful. They give you Section 8  
17 certificate. But what happens. The  
18 ~~Hispanics, because they have the Hispanic~~  
19 ~~name, the landlords does not give the~~  
20 ~~apartments to these people,~~

21 But if they go to the Section 8 and  
22 find out all the European people that go  
23 there, and apply, and have their certificate,  
24 they have apartments because the landlords are  
25 willing to give the apartments to the

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Europeans.

MR. STEIN: So you're saying that there is discrimination against Hispanics for this housing?

MS. SANTIAGO: Yes, yes.

MR. STEIN: We'll look into that.

MS. SANTIAGO: Another thing is, for example, the people. Okay, people want to apply for, like Petra said, people want to apply for New York City housing.

If you have a daughter, and your daughter works, they want to know the income of that daughter, so that daughter says no -- they have to leave the mother alone. So now they have to pay for home attendants to take care of her mother twenty-four hours.

MR. STEIN: We'd like to follow-up these problems in terms of the discrimination against Hispanics in their housing, and we'd like your help on it. If you could give us some data, some information, we will investigate it.

MS. SANTIAGO: And thank God to the new Chairperson, Laura Blackburn, that is forcing

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on the drugs. That woman is -- I'm telling you, I congratulate her, because most of these seniors are living there like in jail, because they are afraid to go downstairs, because they mug them.

But now she gave them a telephone number where they could call if they see any drugs around. So that's wonderful.

MS. DRINANE I want to thank you.

MR. STEIN: Thank you very, very much.

MS. DRINANE we'll put everything in writing.

MS. VIDAL: The next panel is, Antonio Pagan, Executive Director, Lower East Side Coalition for Housing Development, senior Rosa Rodriguez. She's ninety years old, if you don't believe it. And Bill Alicea, the Chairman of the Hispanic Housing Coalition.

MR. STEIN: We want to thank you.

MR. PAGAN: Thank you very much.

MR. STEIN: We want to thank you very much and all the other folks for coming.

MR. PAGAN: I'd like to state that I will be making my brief statements, but I will

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have to leave due to a prior commitment.

But we're very well represented here, and I'm sure that we are going to make things happen with this forum, and many, many other opportunities of working together.

It's important that we have forums of this nature. For years we've been talking about how different issues impact on our community as a whole. But if we were to select which part of which segment of our community problems for our people are afflicted the most, the elderly definitely are on top of the list.

Many times the Hispanic social strengths become their political weaknesses, and we find that by having an extended family concept, and by taking in our own when they become homeless or dissolute, we become invisible to the rest of the city and the programs, and the officials at all different levels.

It's quite convenient to have the social thread of the society to take care of people, leaving agencies and Government off



1  
2 the hook in terms of their responsibility, in  
3 particular, as it it relates to the elderly.

4 Our elderly are impacted by many  
5 issues. I would like to address the concrete  
6 issues that we encounter in the housing  
7 advocacy and the housing development field as  
8 it relates to senior citizens.

9 First of all, as stated very eloquently  
10 here before, as a fact, our people pay more  
11 for the worst type of housing than any other  
12 community in this city. Our people live in  
13 the worst kind of housing than any other  
14 community in the city.

15 We have as a real situations at levels  
16 beyond belief, ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~d  
17 ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~d  
18 ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ing, and in particular, living -- I think  
19 the last statistic was over a hundred  
20 thousand, in the Housing Authority buildings,  
21 putting a drain, not only on the buildings,  
22 but preventing a mobilization and a mobility  
23 into decent, affordable housing. Why?  
24 Because it is simply not being produced.

25 The other area that I want to touch

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upon is [REDACTED] And the social workers that have testified here are the best witnesses to the nightmare that our seniors have to go through.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] to go out there and shop for [REDACTED]. Yes, an extension is viable once or twice, but [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

We are being discriminated against because we're Latinos, we're being discriminated against because our people are elderly, we're being discriminated against because we do not speak the language to the proficiency of other people's expectations.

What we need here is to start talking about solutions. If we are [REDACTED] [REDACTED], we should be listed as landlords. There should be an additional service given to senior citizens, as well as to the general population. Anyone who is in a qualified apartment should be listed. People should be [REDACTED] guided to the apartments that are available.

That makes sense for two reasons. You

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don't waste your time, and two, you can monitor discrimination on a better basis.

Any landlord that is turning away a person, for whatever reason, when they are qualified for that apartment, should not be qualified for Section 8 vouchers. It should not be a prize for them to pick and choose, it should be an obligation that goes along with the certification.

Monitoring is, I think, the key that no one wants to hear about, but is the easiest to implement and will bring the greatest immediate impact to the community.

Social Service agencies have to go and -- to get to one house, go through a maze of certifications, and finally they'll get it when they're sophisticated enough to threaten a lawsuit. We have to go beyond that.

Housing development in the City of New York is inadequate. The City has not come up with an effective policy that can address the greater housing needs, let alone the housing needs of senior citizens.

And I want to tie that in with two

1  
2 issues, entitlement and development as it  
3 relates, particularly, to a senior citizens  
4 Federal 202 project, Casa Victoria.

5 One, as we've said before, if you have  
6 a senior person living with their son, their  
7 cousin, whatever, and that person is qualified  
8 for an apartment, a family structure has to be  
9 severed, because the system does not provide  
10 for maintaining that unity. That has to be  
11 addressed.

12 We have worsened the problem by trying  
13 to better the problem. We need to develop  
14 housing that addresses that need, dual  
15 apartments, housing and programs that will  
16 address keeping the family in intact.

17 Two, when we do build housing, we're  
18 encountering very dangerous opposition. Quite  
19 recently we had the, what is known as the Casa  
20 Victoria ruling on overconcentration of  
21 assisted housing in a community, which, in a  
22 nutshell, states that we can no longer build  
23 housing where we need it the most.

24 And City Government was ineffective in  
25 lobbying against this, and refused to take on

1  
2 the challenge of forcing HUD, and in this  
3 particular case, assuring that the  
4 not-for-profit agencies are going to continue  
5 to build, as well as bringing in more senior  
6 citizen housing.

7 That has to be addressed, because what  
8 we're saying down the road is, El Barrio --  
9 can no longer have housing for senior  
10 citizens, when we don't have that to start  
11 with.

12 There's a great resistance from the  
13 agencies, especially when it comes to  
14 entitlements for the elderly. It takes  
15 forever to get someone pushed up.

16 There are lists everywhere, but as the  
17 lady before us says, we don't even know where  
18 the lists are, what numbers we make on the  
19 lists, and how they're chosen. There is quite  
20 discretion because we've been effective  
21 threatening once or twice with lawsuits to  
22 have people placed.

23 So it works somehow. What we need to  
24 do is bring it out in the open.

25 Finally, I think that we should address

1  
2 the issue of housing on a more complete basis.  
3 Programs for senior citizens should be  
4 developed around the communities in which they  
5 live. We have to look at the composition of  
6 the family. We have to look at preventing  
7 elderly people from falling through the thread  
8 and into the streets, or worse, into the  
9 shelters.

10 Thank you very much.

11 MR. STEIN: Thank you.

12 MR. PAGAN: I have to leave.

13 MR. STEIN: Thank you very much.

14 We should work on the Council together.

15 MS. VIDAL: Rosa Rodriguez.

16 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Good morning, ladies  
17 and gentlemen.

18 I am here today to tell you about my  
19 grandmother, ninety years old, Rosa Rodriguez.

20 When grandma moved to New York over  
21 thirty years ago, she instantly made New York  
22 her home. Still today, with everything that's  
23 happened, she does not want to go to another  
24 state that may offer her a better and  
25 healthier environment, even though we have

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begged her to.

Her plight, you might say, is relatively simple, but it's not. For the past several years she has filled out application after application for housing and Section 8, to no avail.

The status at her apartment now is this: Hardly any heat or hot water in one winter. No ventilation in summer, since her apartment faces an alley. The electrical system is in dangerous condition, and it's a miracle it hasn't caught fire. Constant flooding, plumbing problems, cracked walls, rodents and roach infestation. She also has gates on the fire escapes and four locks on the door, a much too common fact in New York.

Add to this that is a third-floor walkup, and she is a virtual prisoner in her own home. No sunshine day in and day out. The ambulette service has to carry her up and down the stairs for her trip to the doctor.

Grandma has a sound mind, if not a sound body and "nursing home" is not in our vocabulary. We do what we can, but we

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Rodriguez

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des[pair as she says, "Oh God, please don't let me die in this apartment. Please make my last days a little more peaceful and happy."

We don't know if she has twenty years, twenty days or twenty months left to live. But we keep on pounding on doors to find her a reasonable place to live in a peaceful neighborhood, where she could sit outside on a sunny day and enjoy her New York.

Some people, including an Assemblyman, have been trying to help us with this case, but still nothing has changed.

Where does a ninety-year-old person go? They say if she were perhaps twenty years younger, she would find a place. What does that mean?

I leave with you this question. And thank you for your attention.

MR. STEIN: Thank you.

We'll have to find some way to help her, your grandmother, because she should not have to live in an apartment like that under those conditions.

I'd like to ask Tony Rivera, from our



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office, to follow through after this hearing is over, to see what we can do to help you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

MR. STEIN: Unfortunately, her plight is the plight of many Hispanic elderly in the city, and it is not, unfortunately, that rare. There are many thousands and thousands of Hispanic elderly that live where she does, and that is regretful.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

MR. ALICEA: Thank you.

Good morning.

My name is William Alicea, and I'm the Chairman of the New York Hispanic Housing Coalition.

I will read my text, only because of the fact that I took the time and effort to prepare it, structure it, and I think many of the things that have been said here this morning I actually marveled and reflected in my own testimony.

Specifically, we, at the Hispanic Housing Coalition welcome the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

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Alicea

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We are here to share with you our concerns and to present our recommendations regarding the plight of the Hispanic elderly in the area of housing.

But first, I would like to take a few moments to familiarize you with the work of the Hispanic Housing Coalition.

Since its inception in 1978, the New York Hispanic Housing Coalition has been dedicated to the provision of affordable housing for all New Yorkers, with a special focus on Hispanic New Yorkers.

This commitment stems from our firm belief that decent and affordable housing is a necessary underpinning to a strong Hispanic family structure, which, in itself, is a critical ingredient in the creation and maintenance of a vibrant Hispanic and Latino community.

During the last three years, the New York Hispanic Housing Coalition's highest priority has been to increase the availability of affordable housing opportunities for the thousands of hidden homeless families who are

1  
2 living in doubled up, or otherwise  
3 overcrowded, conditions in New York City.

4 Today you've heard testimony from  
5 friends and colleagues as to demographics,  
6 characteristics. However, I would share with  
7 you my observations of over fifteen years in  
8 the housing movement of New York City, and  
9 more specifically, about the Hispanic elderly  
10 population.

11 Where do they live?

12 According to the Puerto Rican Hispanic  
13 Institute for the elderly, the Hispanic  
14 elderly in New York City are concentrated in  
15 low income areas, such as the South Bronx, the  
16 Lower East Side, East Harlem, and the highest  
17 concentration, located in the Washington  
18 Heights and Inwood area.

19 With whom do they live?

20 Most of the Hispanic elderly live with  
21 family members in one of two doubled up  
22 situations: Either they have taken in their  
23 adult children and/or grandchildren, or they  
24 have been forced to move in with other family  
25 members because of high rentals.

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Alicea

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Who cares for them?

Most Hispanic elderly resort to living with their children, siblings, other relatives or unrelated people. Limited health care provided by HRA for homebound elderly, and a small percentage are accepted into senior citizen housing with health-related facilities.

Who do they care for?

In specific situations, Hispanic elderly, living with their children, in doubled up conditions, will supervise grandchildren while parents work or study.

Housing status.

According to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, most Hispanic elderly live in rent controlled or rent stabilized apartments, in low income areas. The Puerto Rican Hispanic Institute contends, according to complaints, that they and we handle, most Hispanic elderly live in substandard housing, riddled with uncorrected Housing Code violations. Although most are eligible for Section 8, many are denied

1  
2 because of discrimination. Also, in many  
3 instances their Section 8 will expire before  
4 they are able to find decent and affordable  
5 housing.

6 In summation, the major problems facing  
7 the Hispanic elderly are: doubled up  
8 situation, substandard housing, nonacceptance  
9 of Section 8, and the low priority given to  
10 the production of senior citizen housing in  
11 the City's ten-year housing plan.

12 I am now going to propose a series of  
13 recommendations, given my experience both at  
14 HPD and what I've seen, many of the programs  
15 to provide for the Hispanic elderly.

16 From a design criteria, to address the  
17 needs of the elderly, we must evaluate how we  
18 can design apartments consistent with the  
19 present family structure which recognizes the  
20 economic status and characteristics of hidden  
21 homeless.

22 Specifically, apartments should be  
23 designed for extended families. For those  
24 families, those apartments should have three  
25 or more bedrooms and should include a second

1 bathroom facility, designed for the elderly.

2 Private ownership.

3  
4 What we have found in a review of the  
5 New York City Housing Partnership New Homes  
6 Program, an alternative to what they're  
7 presently producing, which are mostly two and  
8 three-family homes, would be a large,  
9 one-family home, with additional living  
10 quarters designated for an elderly person,  
11 with all the necessary amenities. This will  
12 provide a separate apartment for the elderly  
13 person, and at the same time, would allow that  
14 senior citizen to have the independence he or  
15 she requires.

16 The economics could easily be worked  
17 out, since most Hispanic elderly are eligible  
18 for Section 8 vouchers, and would, in effect,  
19 be helping to finance the ownership of such a  
20 home. This would make it possible for the  
21 Hispanic family to stay together, to own, and,  
22 if appropriate, provide the much needed day  
23 care services.

24 Three, Low Income Housing Production  
25 Program. Presently, the City should be

1  
2 commended for its production program, but the  
3 reality is that there exists a mismatch  
4 between affordability and availability, and  
5 what we have perceived, and what we perceive  
6 what a home should be.

7 Specifically, we should look at  
8 creating a major production pipeline for  
9 single room occupancy housing, and set aside a  
10 portion designed for the elderly.

11 As part of this elderly production  
12 pipeline, special consideration should be  
13 given to siting these elderly SRO's near other  
14 202 projects and senior citizen centers,  
15 thereby creating linkage with the existence of  
16 court systems and community resources.

17 Four, the Resolution Trust Corporation.  
18 As a result of the savings and loan scandal,  
19 and the creation of the Resolution Trust  
20 Corporation, we have a new, and unknown and  
12 21 untapped resource, namely, the thousands of  
22 dwelling units that landlords have abandoned,  
23 have defaulted on, or are about to default on.

24 Presently, the City does not have a  
25 handle as to how many units there are.

1  
2 Instead, the practice, the present practice by  
3 the Resolution Trust Corporation, is to sell  
4 them privately, at bargain basement prices.  
5 Usually it is reported in the NEW YORK TIMES  
6 at fifty cents on the dollar.

7 Specifically, I would recommend that,  
8 one, a public hearing be held to ascertain the  
9 depth of the problem, since many of these  
10 defaults may be partially financed by City  
11 dollars, through the loan programs.

12 And two, that instead of giving away  
13 bargain basement deals to private landlords,  
14 we should consider disposing of these  
15 properties to non for profits, and in turn,  
16 set aside a percentage of the apartments for  
17 the elderly and low income. That would be  
18 sound public policy.

19 In conclusion, we at the Hispanic  
20 Housing Coalition welcome this opportunity and  
21 invite you, as you had requested earlier, to  
22 do a walking tour of what some of the  
23 apartments actually look like, and to share  
24 with you some of our concerns insofar as our  
25 findings in the area of discrimination.



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Alicea

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I would also welcome the support of the office of the City Council President. The Hispanic Housing Coalition recognizes some of the things that have have been said here earlier with regard to there being a lack of exposure on behalf of the media.

The City of New York does have a fair housing program. That program does not provide information via the Hispanic media.

We have decided at the Hispanic Housing Coalition to submit to that RFP, because of the need that has been spoken of here, information, cultural, and linguistic barriers. Those are the issues we plan to address with that fair housing opportunity.

MR. STEIN: First, I'd like to tell you I accept your invitation, and we would like to go next week to tour some of these housing conditions. And we'd like to work with you very closely on the whole issue.

MR. ALICEA: Thank you.

MR. STEIN: Thank you.

Thank you very much. We look forward to working with you.

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Tapia

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Tell your grandmother that despite all her terrible problems, she looks very beautiful at her age, and we all hope to look so well at ninety.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Gracias.

MR. STEIN: My office is going to help you.

MS. VIDAL: The next panel is Mario Tapia, President of the Latino Gerontological Center, and Roberto Maldonado-Lugo, of Columbia University.

MR. STEIN: Thank you very much, sir.

MR. TAPIA: Good morning.

We, at the Center thank you very much for this opportunity.

Yesterday I had a lunch with seniors from the South Bronx. They are seniors that are going to the Hunts Point Senior Center, and that told me that their numbers and participation had dropped from about fifty to twenty-five. I asked them the reason, and it's because the center, for the past two years, is located on the third floor, with no elevator.

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So they stopped me and they said,  
please let them know that we are still waiting  
to be moved to the ground floor.

To continue with my thoughts, I agree  
and echo many of the words mentioned here.

In general, my feeling, after preparing  
for this presentation, I'm absolutely sure  
that in the year 2000 and on, sociologists and  
anthropologists would agree that this is the  
most abusive situation every population has to  
go through in the United States.

My name is Mario Tapia, President of  
the Latino Gerontological Center, a recently  
formed organization, that will address the  
increasingly troubling situation faced by  
Hispanic elderly in the country, particularly  
in the northeast, as in this case, in the City  
of New York.

Today's presentation has special  
significance, because of the focus in the  
changing demographics being experienced by our  
city.

Change is not easily accepted by  
anyone. Therefore, the figures I'm about to

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quote should be taken with understanding.

Even today, we are still facing an irresponsible and repulsive resistance to the wheels of change for our city.

The City of New York is the home of over 150,000 persons of Hispanic origin, sixty and over, an increase of 60-percent since the 1980 census. This is rapidly increasing as we approach the end of the century. By the year 2020, the number will quadruple, bringing the number to over half a million in the City of New York, Hispanic elderly.

90-percent of them are Spanish multilingual. 90-percent of them, services need to be provided in Spanish. If this is not done, it will only further deny assistance and benefits to the Latino population.

MR. STEIN: So you agree with many of the other speakers that one of the main barriers to Hispanic elderly getting what they are entitled to is the language barrier, and that the City is not doing enough to facilitate that, to have more Spanish-speaking people in the agencies that deal with the

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elderly?

MR. TAPIA: Most definitely. And I think it's in the aegis of monitoring programs, where agencies refuse to hire bilingual staff.

Right now, you have to understand that they just don't want to hire bilingual staff. There are cases in the Bronx where in the population of over 600 Hispanic seniors, only six of them were receiving Meals on Wheels.

It's very clear. We have another case. Yesterday I was called to my office. A Cuban, 65 years-old, in Queens, without food for three days.

And the problems, as you said before, the lack of understanding and the language barrier.

46-percent of them live alone, a clear reflection of the difficult circumstances faced by the Latino families, 46-percent that destroy the myth of the Spanish extended family support system, used as an excuse by those interested on continuing to ignore their responsibility in serving them.

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2                   60-percent are living below or near the  
3 poverty level, indicating a major  
4 responsibility for special legislation  
5 providing resources to Hispanic  
6 community-based organizations.

7                   The issue is so complex, that the  
8 funding of only one or two Latino  
9 organizations for the elderly will not solve  
10 this tremendous need.

11                   On October 11, 1991, today, City  
12 funding is provided to nearly 400 senior  
13 centers, but only ten of them can be  
14 considered Latino-sponsored.

15                   Our government, private corporations or  
16 foundation resources have not been fairly  
17 distributed according to the growing needs of  
18 the Latino community, in general, including  
19 the elderly, despite the growing population  
20 numbers.

21                   A review of the annual plan of a major  
22 New York based foundation says that out of 50  
23 million dollars allocated in 1989, less than  
24 one-percent went to Hispanic organizations.

25                   Hispanics are 25-percent of the City's

1  
2 population. In the year 2030 it will be  
3 47-percent. This half of the future City's  
4 population cannot continue to be ignored.

5 Do we agree that it would make us all  
6 feel we are living in a more compassionate New  
7 York City by helping the Latino elderly when,  
8 of all ethnic groups of the City, are living  
9 in the most flagrant and unfair jeopardy.

10 If this is the case, let me suggest to  
11 you several initiatives.

12 One, development and coordination of  
13 community-based research on the numbers,  
14 issues and problems of the Latino elderly.

15 Two, identify and provide funding to  
16 more than one Latino advocacy organization.  
17 This will help us in the institution building  
18 process.

19 Three, engagement in policy analysis  
20 relating to the formulation of public policy  
21 impacting on the present and future Latino  
22 elderly population.

23 Four, the design and promotion of  
24 effective models of service delivery for the  
25 Latino elderly population, community groups,

1  
2 and the provision of technical assistance to  
3 community groups in terms of grantsmanship,  
4 organizing, et cetera, for program  
5 development.

6 And five, the training of  
7 gerontological specialists that will work with  
8 the Latino elderly population and it's diverse  
9 groups.

10 Social change requires a lot of  
11 courage, President Stein. I'm talking about  
12 social courage. It also requires very special  
13 people to implement it.

14 This hearing, to the members of the  
15 Latino Gerontological Center, is an important  
16 step in the right direction.

17 Mucha gracias.

18 MR. STEIN: Thank you very much, sir.  
19 Your recommendations are very helpful.

20 Thank you.

21 MR. LUGO: Good morning, and thank you  
22 for the opportunity of inviting me.

23 MR. STEIN: Would you state your name,  
24 please.

25 MR. LUGO: Yes, Roberto Maldonado-Lugo,



1  
2 student of the University of the City of New  
3 York, Ph.D. program.

4 I would like to began my presentation  
5 with a general statement.

6 "Many of them, the aged, want but do  
7 not have jobs that will enable them to be  
8 useful. Most of them have insufficient  
9 income. Health services are inadequate.  
10 Living arrangements are generally  
11 unsatisfactory. And this question, in turn,  
12 is tied up with the financial circumstances of  
13 older people."

14 This was written forty years ago by  
15 Clark Tibbits, one of the founders of  
16 gerontology. And forty years later, we are  
17 still dealing with the same issue, housing,  
18 income and others.

19 By approximation to the Hispanic senior  
20 have been from two sources: academia and  
21 research. I worked six or seven years ago as  
22 an Outreach person in Queens.

23 One of the suggestions I have in that  
24 specific area is that we should not post  
25 people in given centers, we should do the

1  
2 outreach in the street, door by door, because  
3 we confront the same problem. They don't come  
4 out, because they think that they won't be  
5 able to handle the situation with the outreach  
6 specialist.

14  
7 One of the issues I would like to make  
8 you aware, too, is the case of women.

9 Elderly Hispanic women have  
10 difficulties in their income, but this is not  
11 because they are now elderly, and this is  
12 related to the income they had before. That  
13 is, in the history of work they get less  
14 salary for the same work that a male do, and  
15 this issue is reflected all of their life.

16 Specifically, transportation. One of  
17 my research is in terms of what I call  
18 extension, where elderly women can go, or  
19 where they cannot go.

20 All these mediators that have been  
21 mentioned here, like housing, income, health,  
22 companionship, cultural aspect, like husband  
23 telling the women where to go, where not to  
24 go, presence or action of other people in  
25 home. Legal residents in the U.S.A., housing

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rules. All these are mediators, affecting where women go and not go in New York City.

So transportation, by itself, we affect that issue, we think we are doing good. We might, but we are downplaying other factors.

For example, platforms on the subway, needing buses, crime in the neighborhood, crime in the subway train. Platforms they have to negotiate.

So this the perspective that I bring you today. For example, in terms of housing, in my research I find out there are certain policies in which a woman cannot stay overnight in other women's apartment because this is against the regulations. Now this is an ethical issue, this is a violation, I think, of the civil liberties of these people, these persons, and this is taking place in Queens.

So I have the information, I have all the facts.

MR. STEIN: We would like to follow through with you.

MR. LUGO: So basically, this is what I

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have to say in terms of the situation today.

Thank you again.

MR. STEIN: Thank you very much.

MS. VIDAL: Our last panel will include Jane Zanca, deputy Director of the Social Security Administration; the Honorable Deputy Commissioner Mary Mayer, of the Department for the Aging, Stephanie Siefken, President of the New York Chapter of the National Hispanic Council on Aging, and Juana Garzon.

MR. STEIN: I want to thank you very much very, very much for coming.

I have to run, unfortunately, because I have a meeting uptown, so I would just like to thank you and to say that this is just the beginning.

I've been involved in a lot of issues over a number of years, and one hearing doesn't change things. When you stay on a issue and stay on it and you stay on it, and show the injustice of it, and bring public attention to it, and raise consciousness on it, and then come up with specific proposals, you get some change.

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So I pledge that I will stay on this issue.

You know, I got my start, really people got to know me in New York City when I investigated the nursing homes fifteen years ago. We've made some major changes in that industry, and I really pledge myself to working on this issue of the Hispanic elderly and making life better for them in New York. And I look forward to working with you all in this endeavor.

Thank you, and please, please excuse me for having to run, but I will read your testimony. And I will like to meet with you in my office next week and discuss these issues with you.

Thank you.

MS. SIEFKEN: I am Stephanie Siefken, President of the National Hispanic Council on Aging, New York Chapter.

I have a lot of information, but I'll be very brief and I'll send you later the whole --

Thank you for inviting us.

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I came today representing the National Hispanic Council on Aging, New York Chapter, an organization founded in 1985, which is formed by volunteers composed of professionals in the areas of health care, gerontology, social work and service providers, who are dedicated to improving the quality of life of the Hispanic Latino elders in the country, and specifically here in New York City, this chapter.

There are a lot of problems in the health field with the Hispanic elderly. One of the most outrageous things is that many of our elders die ten years earlier than their white counterparts.

There are a lot of reasons why that happens. One of them is not just the health, per se, but it's the, you know, the immigration problem they had before they came to this country, the poverty, the lack of education, and English, skill in English, the language. And they need to perform hard work or blue collar work that, you know, many times didn't give them the opportunity to get a

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pension for retirement or Social Security  
enough to have a comfortable old life.

There are a lot of other things. For  
example, lack of knowledge of how the system  
here works, lack of the possibility of getting  
that knowledge because of the lack of the  
language, and some cultural, you know, things  
that makes them afraid sometimes, or because  
of they are proud of their self-control of  
their life, they don't want to go to the  
government, because they don't really know  
that they have a right to get these services.

One of the big problems is that many  
Hispanic elders wait until the last minute,  
when they are really sick, to require medical  
services, and most of the time they go to the  
emergency services places, clinics.

We are having a lot of problems in  
general with our health system, but especially  
with the older population. In our health  
departments, Health and Hospital Corporation  
and many of our state and federal places, they  
really don't have specific programs for  
elders, and less programs for the Hispanic

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community.

It's unbelievable.

Especially in these past ten years more and more health services and social services have been cut, and less and less preventive services are, you know, delivered to our community. Because of that, I don't consider that it's extremely important for us that we have a national health plan implemented as soon as possible, but that wouldn't help our needs at this moment.

So I think that we need to go again to the community and cut overhead, and many of the administrative, you know, expenses that we have sometimes in the community agencies, and give more money to the direct medical services; improve, you know, that medical doctors choose to be family doctors in the future, because we are losing that specialty, and it's very important to have, especially for the elderly and the Hispanic elderly, to be able to relate to a doctor that, you know, send him or her to the other specialties.

And the preventive services that should



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2 be, you know, delivered in their own  
3 communities, too, because we are losing a lot  
4 of money trying to treat symptoms and  
5 diseases, instead of preventing them, and  
6 that's one of the reasons why many of our  
7 elderly die before their time, and we cannot  
8 continue with that.

9 We have to change our health, you know,  
10 the delivery of services, and I really  
11 encourage very much about that.

12 MS. VIDAL: I would appreciate your  
13 written testimony as soon as possible.

14 Your recommendations have been great.  
15 We've made note of them.

16 MS. SIEFKEN: I haven't had time to  
17 write, but I'll send it to you.

18 And thank you for the opportunity.

19 MS. VIDAL: Thank you very much, Mrs.  
20 Siefken.

21 MS. MAYER: I am Mary Mayer. I am  
22 Deputy Commissioner of the New York City  
23 Department for the Aging, which is not only  
24 part of City government, but also the local  
25 area agency on aging. And we're very pleased

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to have this opportunity to address the important subject of the Hispanic elderly.

We began to pay attention to this population back in 1970, when we did the first study ever done in the United States to document their lives and their needs, and that helped us begin to address some of those needs.

I would agree that it was an ever so slow process at the beginning, because, as previous witnesses pointed out, they were a small proportion of the population, but --

MS. VIDAL: What year was that?

MS. MAYER: In 1970, when they were about three-percent of the elderly population. But in ten years their numbers had doubled. And although we don't have final figures yet, we anticipate possibly another doubling. They could be all of 15-percent now, in 1990, of the elderly population.

MS. VIDAL: I think someone had mentioned they currently are 25-percent, between 1970 and '90. They must have come out of the walls.

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MS. MAYER: No, it's in large part a function of a lot of immigration over the years and people who are aging now.

In any event, we are very much aware of their major problems, particularly the fact that they are the most economically disadvantaged among the elderly.

In 1985 we did a study of income of elderly persons in New York City, and we documented that, and we'd be glad to share a copy of that study with you all. And we know that they have poorer health and lack adequate access. And we've also seen, sadly, the erosion of their major asset, the protective environment of an extended family.

When funds for nutrition and other social services first became available to us -- and unfortunately, our funds are limited. They are closed end funding. We do not have entitlement programs.

We did try to use what we knew about the Hispanic elderly to place our programs in parts of the city where they would benefit the Hispanic elderly.

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2           Furthermore, over the years, again, we  
3 recognize it possibly moved very slowly, but I  
4 think the speed is picking up right now. We  
5 have been seeking contractors to deliver  
6 services and making several efforts to involve  
7 sponsors from the Hispanic community.

8           And in the consolidation process of the  
9 senior centers, as has been mentioned here  
10 this morning, we've used the required RFP  
11 process to encourage Hispanic and other  
12 minority agencies to apply for center  
13 sponsorships, and we've made technical  
14 assistance available to those potential  
15 sponsors who have had little previous  
16 experience in proposal writing and the other  
17 technical aspects of that.

18           And I'm very pleased to report that at  
19 this time -- and the process is going to be  
20 underway for a year -- we have three new  
21 Hispanic sponsors to add to the ones we have  
22 already.

23           MS. VIDAL: We'd like to be able to  
24 help you to get a more Hispanic response, so  
25 give us this information.

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MS. MAYER: We will. We'll be happy to do that with you.

In 1991, 13-percent of all the elderly we served through our network, of our community based agencies, were Hispanic. That was up from 8-percent in '88.

And we also have 21-percent of our Title 5 employment program enrollees are Hispanic, and 15-percent of our foster grandparents.

Over the years we've undertaken other initiatives, such as a minority in services enhancement project, because we were very concerned that although it was true, the majority of the Hispanic elderly were still living in well-defined communities, in every single community district in the city, there were clusters of Hispanic elderly, and therefore, they were in areas where they were not part of the predominant cultural or racial group and they were facing barriers, serious barriers, in obtaining services in their neighborhoods, because they lacked knowledge of them, or they had language barriers in

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learning about or accessing them.

As a result, we established the Hispanic Access Project and the City Bilingual Hot Line, which handles about 12,000 requests for assistance a year these days.

Even more recently, under Commissioner Davis, as we've been expanding services to Hispanic elderly, we realize that similar needs existed within other minority groups, and we now have a permanent minority services enhancement, with three ad hoc advisory groups, and, of course, one of these is Hispanic, with representation of the major Hispanic agencies in the city on it.

I would just also like to call attention to the fact that we have translated over forty pieces of information into Spanish. I brought a small sample of that material with me today, because we do agree that getting information is a very serious problem, and you have to work at it constantly.

MS. VIDAL: How is that being distributed?

MS. MAYER: We distribute it as widely

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2 as we can, through as many different -- we let  
3 the Spanish press know about this material, we  
4 distribute it through our own network, and  
5 through the various kinds of Hispanic senior  
6 organizations that we work with.

7 And sometimes we've begin able to to do  
8 it even more broadly, by putting it out into  
9 the communities, and having other -- wherever  
10 there's an event, we try to send our material  
11 out to that event.

12 MS. VIDAL: We go to many events, as  
13 well. I think we'd like to carry bundles of  
14 that material with us, because we reach this  
15 population every day.

16 MS. MAYER: Just one last point.

17 I want to say that, although we do take  
18 pride in what efforts we have made to date to  
19 bring services and entitlements that are not  
20 the ones that we have, but the ones we want to  
21 tell the Hispanic elderly population about, we  
22 are very much aware that there is a lot more  
23 to do.

24 And moreover, we know that for this  
25 group of seniors their needs are not only

1  
2 growing, but changing. And to help meet them,  
3 we are trying to work with our programs to  
4 increase, even in days of great budgetary  
5 constraint, to increase their bilingual  
6 staffs, to overcome language and cultural  
7 barriers, and we are striving to insure that  
8 our services, such as meals and home care, are  
9 designed and delivered with cultural  
10 sensitivity.

11 And very importantly, as we were just  
12 saying a moment ago, in light of the economic  
13 status of the majority of Hispanic elderly, we  
14 have been advocating strongly in urging the  
15 adoption of the most liberal changes in the  
16 SSI modernization project, which will help  
17 many, many of them. That is one program that  
18 really will go to the heart of this matter.

19 But a final thought.

20 While we continue to work to expand  
21 services to the Hispanic elderly, we must  
22 also, as a previous witness said, not fail to  
23 give attention to the younger members of the  
24 Hispanic community, so they can reach their  
25 older years without the severe deficits faced



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by the Hispanic elderly today.

MS. VIDAL: Thank you very much.

Don't go, because we have further questions. You are a tremendous resource.

Can you clarify something for me?

Is the Department for the Aging supposed to target resources, let's say, the total numbers and the level of need compared to the kind of services you provide?

MS. MAYER: We operate under a federal mandate that says we should target these limited resources we have to the elderly that are in the greatest economic or social need, with particular emphasis on the low income minority, which we have tried to do in that recent round of budget cuts, to the extent that we could, we protected our minority programs, all our minority programs. And we will continue to do that as we move into what we know is inevitably another round of cuts.

MS. VIDAL: There are some people that say that we're playing --

MS. MAYER: We probably are in some ways.

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2 We know -- to begin with, the needs of  
3 the elderly population in this city, for all  
4 groups, far outstrips the kinds of resources  
5 we have, and we are going to try to direct  
6 them to those that have the greatest need.

7 MR. RIVERA: I have a question.

8 How could the older Americans be more  
9 responsive to the increasing Latino community,  
10 be made more responsive?

11 MS. MAYER: Well, I think one thing  
12 that has happened is that language, it's being  
13 reauthorized right this very minute, will  
14 probably be signed off within a couple of  
15 weeks. Language that had been in regulations,  
16 which directs us to use our resources on  
17 behalf of, as I said before, those in greatest  
18 need, with particular emphasis on minority,  
19 low income minority elderly, is being moved  
20 into the statute now.

21 So that we will be operating under a  
22 legislative mandate, not merely a regulatory  
23 direction.

24 I think it is something in regard to  
25 getting our resources out, in this way we are

1  
2 going to have to all work together to make  
3 sure they are appropriately distributed. And  
4 we have tried to do that.

5 By the way, you might be interested in  
6 knowing that when we do distribute resources  
7 that come to us, we use a formula in which the  
8 minority population has a very heavy weight,  
9 as does low income minority. We put both  
10 factors into our formula.

11 MS. VIDAL: Thank you very much.

12 Ms. Jane Zanca, Deputy Director of the  
13 Social Security Administration.

14 MS. ZANCA: I think it's very  
15 appropriate to note that today is the day  
16 before the real Columbus Day. I think it's  
17 very appropriate that we have this hearing  
18 today.

19 I am not Hispanic, but I'm a bilingual  
20 employee of the Social Security  
21 Administration.

22 You have my written testimony. I have  
23 covered a lot of different information, but  
24 what I thought I would do is merely highlight  
25 some of the major areas and then open it up

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for your questions.

The four things that I thought I would target are the concerns that have been adressed in terms of benefit accessing, the SSI modernization project, our outreach efforts, the information that we currently have available, and we do for the Hispanic population, and about employment and Social Security and how we try to get additional employees.

As an agency, Social Security prides itself on its service to the public, in general, and we feel that we have made tremendous efforts to provide comparable service to Hispanics, Spanish-speaking, and the Latino population, especially in New York City.

We have thirty-eight field offices, district offices, in the city that service every particular person who lives here.

In most of these offices we do have at least some Spanish-speaking employees. And in some offices, especially in the Bronx, the offices are primarily bilingual employees.

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There is also, as Miss Mayer said, more to be done, and efforts are never quite enough, but we do attempt to continue.

The Social Security Commissioner, Gwendolyn Kings, has as one of her major tasks before her a strong commitment to services for the Hispanic population nationwide.

We have a Hispanic Advisory Affairs Council, which is composed of Hispanic employees within the agency, whose goal is to look at both the needs of the Hispanic employees within Social Security, and the population that we serve and how we can better serve them.

MS. VIDAL: How do they impact on policy?

MS. ZANCA: Okay. They have, number one, the direct ear of the Commissioner. She has offered her services. Primarily, one of the things that they're looking for is how to employ additional Hispanic employees, or bilingual employees, throughout the country.

And we have special agreements for recruitment with the Office of Personnel

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Management for Hispanic employees that takes it out of the regular employment process, looking for employees.

We do advertise in El Diario - La Prensa. We go to colleges, we try to find people who want to work for the government, number one. That's a primary drawback. If you work in City, State, Federal Government, many people do not want to work in the government.

I think it's because of the general perception of government as an employer. But we do attempt to try to go out and look for additional employees.

One of the things that they are currently looking at is how to provide better language services within our district offices, and one of the things that the Commissioner is looking at is the possibility of language training for nonbilingual employees, at present, to help them answer questions of the public.

This is in the beginning stage, this particular effort, but it is something that

1  
2 she does have a strong commitment to looking  
3 into further and to seeing how we can better  
4 utilize our bilingual employees now, how we  
5 can provide more notices, publications in  
6 Spanish.

7 I did provide Mr. Stein's office with a  
8 catalogue of all of our publications that are  
9 available to people, to organizations, and it  
10 also lists in it the publications that are  
11 presently available in Spanish, and a very  
12 simple method for obtaining them. And if  
13 anyone has difficulty obtaining them, they can  
14 contact my office. I'd be more than glad to  
15 help you get them, in almost any quantity that  
16 you might need.

17 So if you would like a supply for your  
18 office of several of the publications that we  
19 do have, we can provide them.

20 MS. VIDAL: He needs to know where you  
21 are.

22 MS. ZANCA: I will give you my card.

23 MS. VIDAL: This is the Deputy  
24 ombudsman. He gets the questions from the  
25 entire city.

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MS. ZANCA: No problem at all. We really do want to help. We do want to reach this population.

Ms. Mayer touched on -- most of your witnesses today have testified about inadequacy of benefit levels in all programs, not just Social Security, although Social Security is one of them, especially SSI.

The benefit levels, as you may know, are set by statute, so that when a lot of things happen and people say, "How can we be expected to live on this?" I understand, and everyone in the office understands.

They're saying that the benefit levels are not adequate. And this was the reason Commissioner King invited Dr. Arthur Fleming, who is a former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, to conduct a series of public meetings throughout the country as Chairperson of the SSI Modernization Project. The meetings were held in New York in November of 1990, and there were representatives of several Hispanic groups, who did testify and who were present at these meetings.



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The meetings did create a dialogue between the Social Security Administration, advocacy groups, state and local government agencies, individual members of the public, and beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries of our program.

They discussed various aspects about SSI, what changes were needed, or might be needed, for the 1990's, and beyond, addressing specifically benefit advocacy and the resource limitations.

The Fleming report was published in the Federal Register in July of this year, and it has become final effective the end of September.

That report is provided to Congress, and it has a lot of recommendations for liberalization of the SSI program.

In tight money situations we don't know precisely what Congress will do, but the more pressure applied, the more people talk to their Congressmen, the more forums like this that you have, the more widely known the problems are, and changes will occur. But

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most of those changes will have to be  
statutory.

In terms of our SSI outreach efforts,  
the Commissioner did recognize that language  
barriers, cultural barriers, poverty, ethnic  
barriers throughout the country, stop people  
from finding out about our programs, from  
applying for our programs. And let's face it,  
city and federal bureaucracies are  
intimidating, and it is very difficult for  
some people who receive a no answer the first  
time to go back and ask again, or to find out  
more information why.

MS. VIDAL: There was a report, the  
Commonwealth Report.

MS. ZANCA: I do know there was a  
Commonwealth Report. I have not seen the full  
document, and I would like to see that.

MS. VIDAL: The only thing that sticks  
out in my mind about that report was a figure  
of 77-percent?

MS. ZANCA: On Social Security  
benefits. I've seen the figure --

MS. VIDAL: On or off. I think it was

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off.

MS. ZANCA: No, it was on.

It was less, and I'm not sure, but there may be some reasons for that. Since I haven't seen the source document, it's kind of hard to comment. But if they're talking about the regular Social Security benefits, if you do not work in covered employment, paying FICA taxes, you're not going to qualify for Social Security. That accounts for some of it.

And where you work at and you're getting paid maybe by an employer not on the books.

MS. VIDAL: How many years does a person have to work in order to take advantage of SSI?

MS. ZANCA: Okay. Of Social Security, the most that you will need for retirement benefits is ten years worth of work in your whole lifetime, at the most.

MS. VIDAL: Continuous or cumulative?

MS. ZANCA: No, cumulative. You earn four quarters a year from Social Security, depending on the analysis. It's \$590 this

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year, per quarter.

But it can be over a forty-year time period, ten years, years total. And one of the things advocacy groups might want to take a look at, we have do have a statement that every citizen, every person who's ever worked at all, can request from us a statement of their earnings. And I can send you -- we can get a package, we can get you thousands millions, if you want, to have people fill out -- it's very simple, their name, Social Security number, address, any other names they might have used, and they will receive an indication of what they've paid into Social Security, how many quarters they have, whether or not they're going to be covered, and a rough benefit amount for when they will reach age sixty-two. This can be very helpful.

MS. VIDAL: You mentioned something which is crucial.

We have many elderly people that came into the country late. And when you say whatever name they used, so that if they have worked, either legally or illegally, for over

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ten years, when they pull that information out, this is something that can be used against them?

MS. ZANCA: No. Records for Social Security are all confidential. This goes to this person only. If they have used other names, we do not report this information to Immigration.

If they were here illegally at one point and they came back in legally, let's say, and they worked previously and they paid taxes, we can credit them for that. As long as you've paid your taxes under Social Security, we don't really care.

Now for SSI, obviously, citizenship or legal residency is a factor and that's a factor in the law. So that is not something that we can really change.

You may be entitled to other state and city services, but in terms of SSI, you're not. But if you did work under Social Security, you can receive.

MR. RIVERA: I have a question on SSI.

MS. ZANCA: Sure.

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MR. RIVERA: I'm aware that SSI benefits are not available in Puerto Rico, and that this creates a problem for people wishing to go from the mainland to -- rather, to their homeland.

Can you comment on that?

MS. ZANCA: Okay.

Well, obviously, that's a statutory thing. It is not in the law that benefits for SSI are received in Puerto Rico. It has been proposed several times.

When I came into the agency in 1976, I was hired as a bilingual employee, with the thought that SSI was going to be imminent in Puerto Rico and we're going to need a whole convoy of personnel down there.

We do have offices in Puerto Rico --provide access -- in order to process it. So this support system is already in place.

I do know that there is going to be a plebiscite in Puerto Rico, and if Puerto Rico changes its status in terms of statehood or nonstatehood, obviously, if it became one of the states, they would probably automatically

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qualify for SSI. There would be a changeover period.

If not, the only thing that can really be done is a push in Congress for that change. And it would have to be statutory. And you're right, income levels in Puerto Rico tend to be a little bit lower.

A lot of people would qualify for basic SSI and the attendant Medicaid, food stamps, or whatever other programs are attached to it.

I would not say the administration is either for it or against it. I think the administration would be for whatever there would be, but we cannot administer something that is not yet legal. At the point at which it would be, we would have an action plan to go down and help the transition smooth for that.

But that would have to be changed. And that is something that you can lobby with your Congressman. I don't know if it will happen easily, assuming the budget constraints. It is a possible program. But it is paid for out of general tax revenues, and it would also

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change the tax base in Puerto Rico, which although pays federal taxes, pays them differently than we do here.

MS. VIDAL: I thank you very much for your participation.

We kept you there a long time, and you gave us lots of information, which we'll be able to share with the other people in our office and working on this project, and look forward to continue to work with you.

And we thank the audience for staying with us and sharing their interest in the Hispanic elderly.

Thank you very much.

(Time noted: 12:05 o'clock p.m.)



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PRESIDENTE DEL CONCEJO MUNICIPAL

ANDREW STEIN  
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AVISO DE PRENSA

10 de octubre de 1991

Puede ponerse en contacto con:

Susan Wiviott  
Conrado Hernández  
(212) 788-3200

STEIN ABRE A DISCUSIÓN POR PRIMERA VEZ LOS SERIOS PROBLEMAS  
QUE AFECTAN A LAS PERSONAS MAYORES (ANCIANOS) HISPANOS

Personas mayores hispanas, que viven en la pobreza y han sido víctimas de la falta de comunicación que existe entre ellos y las agencias gubernamentales, concurrirán mañana, 11 de octubre, a testificar en unas vistas patrocinadas por el Presidente del Concejo Municipal, Andrew Stein, en miras a obtener soluciones a todos esos graves problemas.

Expertos en los problemas que agobian a los ancianos, ya sea porque han fundado instituciones para su bienestar o porque han dedicado su vida a compenetrarse de sus aflicciones, también depondrán presentando un panorama extenso de cuál es el futuro que espera a este segmento de la población, que se espera que se cuadruplique para el año 2020.

Entre las víctimas estarán:

- \* Gloria Mojica- de 62 años, trabaja jornada parcial y gana menos de 5 mil dólares al año. Nunca ha recibido asistencia del gobierno, a pesar de que también cuida una nieta de 14 años. Aún así, subsiste...
- \* Rosa Rodríguez- de 90 años, vive en el tercer piso de un edificio sin ascensor. Ha tratado por años de conseguir un apartamento para ancianos, pero el gobierno la mantiene "dando la vuelta y dando la vuelta."
- \* Regina Escobar- de 71 años, viuda. Le quitaron el S.S.I. Recibe \$628 del Seguro Social, y tiene que pagar un alquiler de \$772.92, pero ella continúa luchando para tratar de atar los cabos...
- \* Juana Garzón- de 66 años, quien se ha dedicado a exponer los problemas de su clase y ha luchar por

soluciones.

Entre los que conocen los problemas de los ancianos y testificarán están:

- \* Suleika Cabrera Drinane- fundadora y directora ejecutiva del Instituto para Envejecientes Puertorriqueños e Hispanos. Presentará las razones para la entrada tardía de los ancianos hispanos a los programas.
- \* Mario Tapia- presentará las figuras demográficas de los ancianos y la situación actual. ¿Dónde estamos y hacia dónde vamos?
- \* Edwin Méndez- presentará la realidad del anciano hispano. ¿Por qué están sometidos a tanto descuido por parte del gobierno?
- \* Antonio Pagán- director ejecutivo del Lower East Side Coalition for Housing Development y aspirante a concejal por el distrito 2 de Manhattan. Pagán expondrá la falta de hogares para ancianos y el pobre acceso de los envejecientes latinos a éstos.

Las vistas comenzarán a las 10 de la mañana, en el New York County Lawyers Association, en el 14 de la calle Vesey en Manhattan.

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PARA PUBLICACIÓN INMEDIATA  
18 de octubre de 1991

LOS PROBLEMAS QUE CONFRONTAN LAS PERSONAS MAYORES HISPANAS

Tuve recientemente la oportunidad de escuchar de boca de un número de personas mayores hispanas los retos que ellos confrontan cada día.

Algunos llegaron en silla de ruedas; otros llegaron hasta el área donde estaba la mesa para los deponentes ayudados por un bastón, pero todos hablaron vigorosamente y llenos de convicción.

Una de las mujeres que testificaron fue Paula Román, de 67 años, residente de Brooklyn.

Hablando en español, señaló: "Tengo diez hijos. Y la nación se ha beneficiado con ellos, porque son todos productivos. Tengo una hija que trabaja en el Pentágono. Tengo un hijo que ha recién regresado del Golfo. Esos son los beneficios que le he dado a la nación."

Aún así, explicó, ha estado bajo amenaza de desahucio, porque el casero, que compró recientemente su casa, desea vaciar el edificio. Ella ha recurrido a varias agencias solicitando asistencia, pero aun así nadie la ha ayudado.

Según otros testificaron, tanto ancianos como personas que trabajan con ellos, esto no es poco común. Hay una percepción generalizada que, de alguna manera, el anciano hispano no existe, y si existiera, sus necesidades son atendidas en el círculo de su extensa familia.

En años anteriores, esta percepción pudo haber sido válida, pero con mucha más frecuencia sirve como una cortina de humo para no reconocer las verdaderas necesidades de esta comunidad creciente.

Ya que muchos hispanos son inmigrantes, y usualmente los inmigrantes son jóvenes, el porcentaje de hispanos que son mayores anda rezagado con respecto a otros grupos. Pero esto está rápidamente cambiando.

Más aún, el hecho de que los hispanoamericanos a menudo permanecen firmemente unidos a su familia no quiere decir que todas sus necesidades sean satisfechas. Después de todo,

hay muchas cosas que las familias no pueden proveer. Cuando envejecemos, por ejemplo, todos necesitamos tener acceso a un cuidado médico decente. Además, todos anhelamos la clase de camaradería y apoyo que ofrecen los centros para envejecientes sufragados con dinero público.

Hoy día hay muy pocas de estas instalaciones que ofrecen servicios a los hispanos. En el caso de la vivienda, ningún anciano debería vivir en un edificio con un ascensor defectuoso, sin calefacción o agua caliente. Aun así, según testificó una mujer joven, por esa situación es que está pasando su abuela.

De acuerdo al testimonio, su abuela de 90 años, Rosa Rodríguez, vive encerrada. A pesar de constantes esfuerzos, ella dijo, no ha podido hallarle a su abuela un apartamento que pueda costear.

Muchos de los desafíos que afronta el anciano hispano son resultado de su historial económico. La verdad es que muchos hispanos no tienen la misma clase de respaldo, en cuanto a seguro o pensión, cuando envejecen, en comparación con lo que tienen otros americanos. Las razones son muchas, dependiendo de la clase de trabajo que llevaron a cabo por años, cuando pudieron haber inmigrado a los Estados Unidos, o qué clase de impedimentos pudieron haber hallado debido a su etnicidad o estatus de inmigrante.

Esa es la razón por la cual se hace cada día más importante en Nueva York establecer mecanismos para asistir a la gente, que trabajaron toda su vida, para encontrarse ahora con tan pocos recursos.

Debe de haber más propaganda para hacerles saber a las personas mayores que son los beneficios de S.S.I. o Ingreso Suplementario. Estos beneficios también deberían extenderse a personas que viven en Puerto Rico.

Desafortunadamente, algunos ancianos que ya están retirados, se ven obligados a permanecer aquí en Nueva York, cuando preferirían y estarían mucho mejor en su lugar de nacimiento.

Según yo continúe investigando los problemas que afectan a las personas mayores hispanas, iré obteniendo indudablemente más recomendaciones. Hay mucho más que hacer. Según sigo investigando, iré confiando en los consejos de muchos expertos en este campo, y en reconocimiento de su asistencia en las recientes vistas celebradas en la alcaldía, me gustaría mencionar algunos nombres.

Estos son: Suleika Cabrera Drinane, directora del Instituto para Envejecientes Puertorriqueños e Hispanos; Edwin Méndez Santiago, director, de RAICES; Mario Tapia, presidente del Centro Gerontológico Latino; Stephanie Siefken, presidente del New York Chapter of the Hispanic Council on Aging; Antonio Pagan, director ejecutivo del Lower East Side Coalition for Housing Development and vencedor en las primarias demócratas para el Concejo Municipal; William Alicea, presidente del Hispanic Housing Coalition; Jane Zanca, vice directora de la Administración de Seguro Social y Mary Mayer, del Departamento del Envejeciente.

También me dirijo a cualquier persona mayor hispana que necesite asistencia, que se ponga en contacto con Antonio Rivera, quien dirige mi Oficina del Defensor del Pueblo, o como se conoce en inglés "Ombudsman", llamando al teléfono (212) 669-7635. Tanto él como sus ayudantes que hablan español estarán disponibles para ayudarle.

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NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT

ANDREW STEIN  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 17, 1991

Contact: Susan Wiviott (212) 788-3200

Eamon Moynihan

#### HEARING ON PROBLEMS FACING THE HISPANIC ELDERLY

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear from a number of Hispanic senior citizens about the challenges they face every day. Some arrived in wheel chairs, others made their way up to the witness table with the help of a cane, but all spoke forcefully and with conviction. One woman, who testified was Paula Roman, a 67 year-old senior from Brooklyn. Speaking in Spanish, she said, "I have ten children. And the nation has benefited, because they are all productive. I have a daughter who works in the Pentagon. I have a son who has recently returned from the Gulf. These are the benefits I have given to the nation." Yet she explained, she is under threat of eviction, because the landlord who recently purchased her house wants the building vacated. She went to various social service agencies asking for help, yet no one helped her.

As other witnesses testified, both seniors and advocates, this is not unusual. There is a widespread perception that, somehow, the Hispanic elderly do not exist, and if they do, their needs are met within the extended family. In past years, this perception may have been valid, but increasingly it serves as a smokescreen for the failure to recognize the real needs of this growing community. Because many Hispanics are immigrants, and usually immigrants are the young, the percentage of Hispanics who are older lags behind other groups. But that is rapidly changing. In addition, the fact that Hispanic Americans often remain closely attached to their extended family in no way means that all their needs are being met. After all, there are many things that families cannot provide. When we become older, for example, we all need access to decent medical care. In addition, we all crave the kind of friendship and support that publicly sponsored senior centers offer. At present, there are far too few of these facilities, which cater to Hispanics. In the case of housing, no senior should live in a building without a working elevator or heat and hot water. Yet as a young woman testified, that is exactly what her grandmother does. According to the testimony, her 90 year-old grandmother, Rosa Rodriguez, lives as a virtual shut-in. In spite of

constant efforts, she testified, she has not been able to find her grandmother an affordable apartment.

Many of the challenges that Hispanic elderly face are the result of their economic histories. The plain fact, is that many Hispanics do not have the same level of insurance or pension coverage when they become older as do other Americans. The reasons are many, depending on what kind of work they may have performed over the years, when they may have immigrated to the United States, or what kind of impediments may have been placed in front of them because of ethnicity or immigrant status. That is why it will become increasingly important here in New York to establish mechanisms to assist people, who worked their whole lives, yet now find themselves with too few resources. For one, there must be greater outreach to make seniors more aware of Supplement Security Income or SSI benefits. These benefits should also be extended to people living in Puerto Rico. Sadly, some seniors in their retirement years, are forced to remain here in New York, when they would prefer and would be better off living on the isle of their birth.

As I continue to investigate the issues facing the Hispanic elderly, undoubtedly I will have more recommendations. There is much more to do. As I continue on this issue, I will rely on the counsel of many experts in the field, and in recognition of their help on the recent hearing, I would like to mention some names. They are Suleika Cabrera-Drinane, Director of the Institute for Puerto Rican Hispanic elderly; Edwin Mendez-Santiago, Director of RAICES; Mario Tapia, President of the Latino Gerontological Center; Stephanie Siefken, President New York Chapter of the Hispanic Council on Aging; Antonio Pagan, Executive Director of the Lower East Side Coalition for Housing Development and City Council nominee; William Alicea, Chairman Hispanic Housing Coalition; Jane Zanca, Deputy Director Social Security Administration, and Mary Mayer, Department for the Aging.

I also call on any Hispanic elderly needing assistance to contact Antonio Rivera, who heads my Ombudsman unit, at (212) 669-7635. He and his Spanish speaking aides will be ready and willing to help.