



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pedro Espada Jr.

Espada Helps Rescue Senior Centers from Closure

PEDRO ESPADA, JR. June 15, 2010

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Espada Helps Rescue Rain Bailey, Tolentine-Zeiser and 7 Other Bronx Senior Centers from Mayor's Targeted Closure

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Hundreds of senior citizens in the 33rd district who call Tolentine-Zeiser Senior Center and Rain Bailey Senior Center their homes away from home are breathing a sigh of relief now

that the New York State Senate included an \$18 million allocation in this week's emergency spending budget earmarked for these and 48 other senior facilities, including seven others in the Bronx, throughout the five boroughs that were targeted last month by Mayor Bloomberg for closure.

"The Senate provided funding in the emergency state budget passed on Monday night to protect one of the city's most vulnerable populations – our senior citizens," said Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada, Jr., who represents the 33rd district.

Last month, as Espada visited senior centers throughout the district for pre-Mother's Day festivities, he left seniors with a small gift and words of encouragement that he would do everything he could to keep their facilities open. Most had expressed their concern and appealed to him for help.

The directors at Tolentine-Zeiser and Rain Bailey, and the seniors they serve, praised Espada for keeping his promise and were elated by the news.

"We are so happy for our seniors," said Elizabeth Sanchez, director of the Tolentine-Zeiser Senior Center. "They were very upset to learn that the center was being closed. We've been packing, but now we'll just have to unpack and have a big celebration. We are very grateful to Senator Espada. Our seniors love him, and now that he has helped save their center, they love him even more!"

Added Belinda Lacen-Cave, director of the Rain Bailey Senior Center, "Emotions were running high because this facility is so important to many lives. This is a second home to our seniors, a place they come for a meal, conversation, recreation or just a hug. We are grateful to Senator Espada. We know how hard he fought to make this happen."

Last week, Espada declared he would not vote for additional emergency state budget bills if the Governor continued to include massive cuts to services, including a \$1.4 billion reduction in the education budget. Espada's actions not only got the Governor to remove education cuts in Monday's emergency budget bill, but he also worked with his colleagues to include the \$18 billion allocation to save senior centers.

Mayor Bloomberg announced last month during the unveiling of his executive budget to close 50 senior centers, including 9 in the Bronx, due to a budget shortfall. Tolentine-Zeiser and Rain Bailey were scheduled to close at the end of June.

"The Senate prioritized funding for these centers; we now urge the Mayor to do the same by utilizing this \$18 million in resources to continue the uninterrupted services for hundreds of seniors who rely on Tolentine-Zeiser and Rain Bailey," Espada said. In a May 24, 2010 letter to the Mayor and city Department of Aging Commissioner Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, Espada said, "Although... [the] economic crisis requires hard decisions and budget cuts, it is imperative that we maintain our responsibility to the most vulnerable populations... The lunch program, nutrition classes, sewing and other program activities positively impact [the] quality of life [for seniors]. I urge you to reconsider."

Ms. Sanchez, whose facility serves over 65 lunches daily, said, "Most of the seniors told me they would just stay home if Tolentine-Zeiser was forced to close its doors. It would have been terrible because they come here to enjoy recreational programs, they socialize, and they celebrate birthdays and holidays. We have a computer lab and provide entertainment."

Noting that Rain Bailey serves breakfast and lunch and offers many programs on a daily basis to seniors who either live in the same complex or nearby, Ms. Lacen-Cave said, "The seniors were pleading with us to find a way to stay open. They didn't know where they would go or how they would spend their time. Alternative facilities are too far away. Thanks to Senator Espada, we no longer have these worries." #