TESTIMONY FOR 2025 JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON HOUSING
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TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY
EUSTACIA SMITH, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY,
WEST SIDE FEDERATION FOR SENIOR AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Thank you to Joint Legislative Committee for the opportunity to testify on the State Fiscal Year 2025-26 Budget for the Division of Housing and Community Renewal. My name is Eustacia Smith, and I am from West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing. For 50 years, we have developed and operated low-income housing for older adults and currently houses over 2,500 residents across 31 buildings in Manhattan and The Bronx. We know intimately that stably housing residents as they age in place depends on providing critical services along with housing. That is why I urge you to fund the **Affordable Independent Senior Housing Resident Assistance Program** (A.1948/S956.) This program would fund a staff member in independent affordable senior housing, called a Resident Assistant, to assist residents with obtaining a broad range of services that will enable them to age in place, even as a person's needs change over time.

While affordable senior housing supports independent living, a key link is often missing—help navigating complex government and community programs, including the MLTC program. These services can be difficult to enroll in and maintain, particularly in a tech-centric world where basic appointments are often made online. Without support of an on-site staff person, many seniors don't know how to access services or give up at some point during the process.

Sometimes there are barriers beyond just technical. Accessing home health aide services can be a complex lengthy process but also can trigger tough emotions regarding loss. Many older adults struggle with acknowledging that they need the help of a home health aide, after a lifetime of caring for themselves and their family. A Resident Assistant can help them come to terms with the fact that they need care through building a personal, trusting relationship and supporting them past those barriers.

Resident Assistants also help address social isolation so often faced by older adults, noticing when someone is isolated and reconnecting them to community activities. A wealth of recent data shows that loneliness leads to poor health and decline, while social connections support better health and longer independent living. (1)

We applaud Governor Hochul and the team of people who put together the states Master Plan on Aging. This program is included as one of the proposals in the state's Master Plan. The plan recognizes that no currently existing program can do what on-site services in senior housing provided by a resident assistant can do to keep people housed as they age in place. However, the plan is only useful if it is funded and implemented.

It is critical that we implement programs like this, as all of the data show that older adult population is booming, while at the same time, long-term care options are strained and shrinking. This program is a cost-effective solution to keep older adults housed in the community, reducing hospitalizations and reliance on expensive nursing homes.

A similar program funded by HUD provides data that this kind of program works to reduce hospitalizations, reduce reliance on nursing facilities and saves significant dollars. (2;3) But it is underfunded and only available to a small fraction of the buildings that could qualify for it.

The Resident Assistant bill asks for just $2 million per year over 5 years. Once the program is launched, 1,600 residents would see an immediate benefit and the state would see an estimated yearly net savings in Medicaid of $4.5 million.

Help us ensure older adults can age in place and avoid institutional care by funding the **Affordable Independent Senior Housing Resident Assistant Program and thank you to Assembly Member Rosenthal, Senator Kavanagh for sponsoring this bill and to all those who have co-sponsored it.**

1. Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks | National Institute on Aging
2. https://leadingage.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal/Housing%20Services%20Value.pdf
3. https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2020/7-12_HUD-Funded-Service-Coordination-Programs.pdf#:~:text=Additionally%2C%20the%20AASC%20Online%20system%20has%20identified,.%E2%80%9D%20In%20terms%20of%20cost%20savings%2C%20a