



**We refuse to be invisible**

**Testimony to the NYS Legislature’s Joint Budget Hearing on Housing**

**Delivered in person on February 4, 2019**

**by Melissa Sklarz, Senior Government Relations Strategist**

On behalf of SAGE and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) elders we serve, thank you to members of the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today and allowing me the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of SAGE with respect to the FY20 State Budget. My name is Melissa Sklarz and I am the Senior Government Relations Strategist for SAGE.

Founded in 1978 in New York City, SAGE is the country’s first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older people. Forty years after our founding, SAGE is realizing a dream that’s been years in the making. With support from New York City and State, SAGE is building our state’s first LGBT-welcoming affordable elder housing: Ingersoll Senior Residences in Fort Greene, Brooklyn and Crotona Senior Residences in the Bronx, NY.

These buildings will offer affordable senior housing and will feature ground floor SAGE Centers, open to building residents and older people from the local community. Through these SAGE Centers, SAGE will offer care management and support services to building residents and elders in the surrounding communities.

In Brooklyn, SAGE is working with BFC Partners to build Ingersoll Senior Residences, located on the New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) Ingersoll Houses campus. In the Bronx, SAGE is partnering with HELPUSA to build Crotona Senior Residences in the Tremont neighborhood of that borough.

Ingersoll Senior Residences, which will be the largest LGBT-welcoming elder housing development in the country and the first in New York State, will offer 145 affordable apartments, and a 6,800 square-foot street-level SAGE senior center. In addition, 25% of the units will house formerly homeless elders.

Crotona Senior Residences will offer 84 LGBT-welcoming affordable apartments. The marquee of Crotona Senior Residences will be its ground-floor 10,479 square foot SAGE Center, making it the largest SAGE Center in the City. This development will also house a diverse older adult population and twenty-six (30%) of the 84 units will house chronically homeless elders.

Each of these buildings' SAGE Centers will be open to building residents, SAGE Center constituents from our existing centers in each of these boroughs and older people from the local community.

Service-enriched LGBT-friendly housing is crucial for our state's LGBT elders. Aging alone can be wrought with challenges, including social isolation and diminished income. For LGBT older people, however – many of whom have experienced stigma and discrimination throughout their lives as a direct result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity – the deck is stacked against them.

This uneven playing field has lasting effects on their financial security. More than four in ten LGBT Americans over the age of 65 cite financial problems as a major concern. Further, 47% report having less than \$10,000 in savings and assets; and 30% are concerned about their housing stability.<sup>1</sup>

LGBT older people are facing profound challenges in accessing welcoming housing. A 2014 ten-state investigation conducted by the Equal Rights Center and SAGE found that 48% of same-sex older couple testers seeking housing in senior independent living facilities across the country experienced discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

The data from these studies shows the pervasive challenges that LGBT elders face when seeking housing. In New York City, housing challenges are particularly acute. Countless LGBT older people find themselves priced out of the neighborhoods in which they have lived for years due to rising rents and financial insecurity as they age. Unless effectively addressed, this housing crisis among LGBT older people will only worsen as the LGBT elder population doubles and more "out" LGBT people age into their retirement years. In fact, research estimates there are between 2.5 and 4 million LGBT older adults in the United States – and this population will

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<sup>1</sup> Movement Advancement Project and SAGE (2010). *Improving the Lives of LGBT Older Adults*.

<sup>2</sup> SAGE & Equal Rights Center (2014). *Opening Doors: An Investigation of Barriers to Senior Housing for Same Sex Couples*.

double by 2030.<sup>3</sup> Yet today, there are just ~500 units of affordable housing in existing LGBT-welcoming complexes nationwide.

LGBT older New Yorkers need and deserve affordable, welcoming housing. This is why SAGE is partnering with developers to build New York State's very first LGBT-welcoming, affordable elder housing developments. In addition, these buildings will bring much needed services to neighborhoods lacking in LGBT supports.

The centerpieces of these buildings and the hubs for service delivery for residents and community members will be ground floor, full service SAGE Centers, managed and staffed by SAGE, open to all people age 60+ who live in the building, SAGE Center constituents from our existing centers in each of these boroughs and older adults from the local community. Through these SAGE Centers, SAGE will offer programming and daily meals, in addition to comprehensive care management and support services to building residents and older people in the surrounding communities.

The SAGE Centers will follow SAGE's highly successful model, offering residents and local community members daily congregate meals, social services, educational workshops, counseling, health, wellness and nutrition classes, and peer support – complimented by on-site care management.

SAGE is respectfully requesting support from New York State to hire services and care management staff to meet the anticipated demand for services among building residents and members of the surrounding community.

In Brooklyn, Ingersoll Senior Residences is located on the Ingersoll Houses campus of NYCHA public housing. NYCHA reports that the average income level of households living in the Ingersoll Houses is \$23,889. SAGE anticipates that Ingersoll's SAGE Center will serve a demographic of low-income LGBT elders that mirrors this income level. In addition, there is an overall dearth of resources for older people in the adjacent housing developments. As such, SAGE expects serving an influx of elders from the surrounding Fort Greene community, including older public housing residents in Ingersoll, Walt Whitman and Farragut Houses, which surround the site of Ingersoll Senior Residences.

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<sup>3</sup> Choi, S. and Meyer, I. (2016). *LGBT Aging: A Review of Research Findings, Needs, and Policy Implications*. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

What this means is a significant demand in services. SAGE respectfully requests \$200,000 in funding from the New York State legislature to provide comprehensive care management and support services to low income, predominately LGBT, elder residents in and around these buildings through our SAGE Centers. Thank you for your consideration. We deeply value our partnership with you and look forward to working closely with you in the future.