



184 ELDRIDGE STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10002  
212-453-4555  
UNIVERSITYSETTLEMENT.ORG

## **FY26 Aging Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony to the New York City Council**

### **FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Aging Council Member Susan Zhuang, Chair**

**March 12, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Zhuang and members of the Council.

My name is Katherine Suero, and I am speaking today on behalf of Wellness Together, University Settlement in support of increased funding for home delivered meals for older adults.

The Home Delivered Meals Program provides daily nutritious meals to homebound seniors who are unable to shop for or prepare food on their own. Beyond meals, this program also offers case management and critical wellness checks for individuals who are at high risk of social isolation.

At Wellness Together, University Settlement, our program serves over 1000 vulnerable, homebound New Yorkers in the Lower East Side and China town (Community District 3). For many of these older adults, these meals are not just a supplement; they are their primary source of daily nutrition.

The Home Delivered Meals program not only meets participants' most basic nutritional needs, but it also provides our most socially isolated participants with daily social interaction.

The meal delivery staff is capable of bringing critical information about our clients, which helps our Older Adult Program provide the support they need to live safely and independently.

However, what we continue to see is that many recipients of home delivered meals are still experiencing food insecurity. As a result, our case managers and social workers frequently connect participants to additional resources such as food pantries, Citymeals mobile grocery programs, and breakfast box distributions just to help them get through the week.

This highlights the depth of need among a population that is often invisible and overlooked.

Currently, the City only funds home delivered meals five days per week. But for homebound older adults, the need for reliable access to food exists every day.

That is why the City must invest \$30 million to operationalize Council Member Linda Lee's Intro 280 and ensure that meals are funded seven days a week.

This investment would provide a consistent lifeline for thousands of older New Yorkers who depend on these meals for their health, dignity, and independence.



I urge the Council to recognize the growing needs of this population and support the programs that serve them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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