



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

April 13, 2015

Donna M. Corrado, PhD
Commissioner
New York City Department for the Aging
2 Lafayette Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Corrado,

I am writing to request information regarding the Department for the Aging's (DFTA) plan to service emerging immigrant senior citizen communities.

Recently, stakeholders in the South Asian community, the Alliance of South Asian American Labor (ASAAL) in particular, have shared concerns with my office about the lack of culturally-sensitive services accessible for seniors in their community. Stakeholders noted that certain senior centers in emerging immigrant communities do not offer services in Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi or Hindi and that many seniors need Halal food or all vegetarian meals to meet their religious and dietary needs. This is troubling, given the fact that New York City is home to over 300,000 people of South Asian origin—one of the largest South Asian communities in the nation.

Citywide, immigrants account for nearly 38 percent of the population, with 1 in 10 immigrant seniors in the entire country residing in the five boroughs. As a result, it is imperative that our city's services adapt to meet the needs of these seniors.

In accordance with Executive Order 120, DFTA created a Language Access Plan in 2009.¹ While that document notes that certain services are provided in Bengali given the "predominance of Bengali immigrants among southeast Asians served by their program," it is imperative that DFTA remain ahead of Census trends, rather than responding to significant demographic shifts after the fact.

Given these concerns, what work has DFTA done to create a plan to address the needs of emerging linguistic groups in senior centers? What plan is in place to properly staff senior centers with linguistically capable and culturally sensitive staff at centers in emerging communities? And what work has been done to survey communities and utilize demographic data to meet the dietary, religious, and cultural needs of these groups?

¹ http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/dfta/dfta_language_access_plan.pdf.

Finding a solution to the issue of culturally-sensitive senior programming and staffing is vital given the accelerating demographic changes in senior communities served by DFTA. A review of the planning that DFTA is undertaking to meet those needs would go a long way towards alleviating concerns in emerging communities.

Thank you very much for your assistance on this matter. I look forward to your response and to working together to better meet the needs of immigrant senior citizens.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller