

I am grateful to our legislators listening to us today, & for taking seriously your role as champions for aging. The resolution you are considering today is an important step in demonstrating to OA & families that you are committed to age equity, & are open to working with the comm. to improve aging & build economic justice for OA in On. Co.

among older adults is on the rise, outpacing rates of increase in the general population – older adults make up about 15% of the homeless population. People over 85 have the highest rates of suicide. Caregivers are burnt out, and especially black caregivers who are 69% less likely than their white peers to receive support. Yet, despite this expanding population and evolving and increasing needs, less than one percent of the NYS budget is allocated to aging-specific needs.

TY.

When A stay in their home - 70% + want to - they get better. It also costs them less, & saves our systems & costs associated w/ Medicaid

The most pervasive and pernicious problem is, in my opinion, isolation and loneliness. As humans, we are hardwired for connection and belonging. We've inherited it in our DNA. It's not just something that's nice when we can do it. Being in community and being in connection helps us keep our stress levels down, identify dangers, and ensure that we collaborate to solve common problems.

The reverse is also true. The stress we experience as humans when we are alone for too long has the same impact on our bodies as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Today, nearly one quarter of people over 65 are socially isolated, meaning they do not have access to things like transportation, quality housing, caregivers, or health care, that would help them age well. An overwhelming 43% of people over 60 are lonely – they do not have the social contacts and relationships they need to feel connected and content. Being isolated and lonely makes people less healthy, it reduces independence, and it hastens decline and death. It causes elders to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, unseen in their families, and irrelevant in the communities they built.

This simple truth – that being together makes us healthier, is why our closest animal relatives, apes and monkeys, groom one another. Touching one another, caring for one another in such an intimate way, is a ritual of community and act of survival. It's a way of telling each other, I'm going to take care of you, you belong to this tribe, you're going to be ok, and so am I.

Our modern society is not set up to promote these acts of caring and connection. But we can fix that. Everyone in this room has the power within your own spheres of influence to notice how ageism is showing up and to create new moments of visibility and belonging across generations – because this isn't just an aging problem; youth and adults and people of all ages are lonely and disconnected and at risk of isolation-related health diseases.

You can be a champion for aging, and that can look like a lot of things.

- Volunteer with programs that promote intergenerational connections.
- Think about what aging well means to you, get educated, and make a plan. Share it with your family. Don't wait for a crisis. (There are resources in the back to help you get started)

having a senior moment, when we forget something. We say things like, “You look good for your age.” Try something – think of any other group of people who have experienced marginalization or oppression because of their protected class – gender, race, nationality, ability level – and insert that group into the statement - “You look good for ____”. It gets uncomfortable pretty quick, doesn’t it? You wouldn’t say it, would you? And yet, we say ugly and uncomfortable things about older people all the time. Sometimes we think it’s funny. Sometimes, we’ve have been taught to take it as a compliment.

This ugly, uncomfortable thing - It's called ageism. And it is a complex form of oppression that we need to talk more about. It's not just how we treat one another, or the lies we tell ourselves about what we are capable of as we get older. It's about how systems treat us. It's why more than half of people over 50 say they have been pushed out of the workforce. (It goes both ways – nearly half of young people say they have experienced ageism at work, too). It's why nursing home residents remained isolated and shut off from their families and their communities for months, and months, and months during the Covid pandemic. It's why nationally, less than 2% of philanthropic dollars support aging-specific programs.

Once we’ve accepted that we are all a little bit ageist, we can start to ask other, bigger questions about the size and scope of the problem, and how to address it. And to be clear, aging isn’t the problem. Ageism is.

Let’s start with some statistics:

- 18% of people in Onondaga County are over 65 years old – by the end of this decade, it is predicted that nearly one quarter of residents will be older adults
- In Syracuse, these changes have been especially pronounced in the past decade:
 - o The number of older residents grew by nearly 43%
 - o The number of older African Americans grew by 63%, and the number of older Hispanic people swelled by 250%

The older adults in our community are a hidden powerhouse. Across our state, older New Yorkers commit more than 495 million hours of community service each year. They are the number one volunteer group, and they represent 42% of the local tax base. They are the number 1 entrepreneur group, and the biggest givers to charity. These folks are traveling and learning, they are falling in love and renewing their purpose and raising their grandchildren.

But, because we are a society that favors youth and is not well prepared to support aging, we have some problems. In the past decade, the number of older Syracuseans living in poverty has more than doubled. We have the third highest rate of senior poverty in the state. Homelessness

Letter in Support of Property Tax Relief for Seniors

Advocating to Raise the Income Limit for Senior Property Tax Relief Programs

Dear Onondaga County Legislators

I am writing to express my strong support for expanding and enhancing property tax relief programs for seniors, with a particular emphasis on raising the income limit for eligibility. As members of our community age, many face increasing financial challenges due to fixed incomes, rising healthcare expenses, and the growing cost of living. Property taxes, while essential for funding public services, can become a significant burden for senior citizens striving to remain in their homes and maintain their independence.

Current property tax relief programs provide essential support, but the existing income limits often exclude seniors who, while not wealthy, live just above the cutoff and still struggle to afford their property taxes. Raising the income threshold would allow more seniors to qualify for much-needed relief, ensuring that those who dedicated their lives to building our community are not forced to leave their homes due to financial constraints.

Supporting this change not only reflects our community's values of compassion and respect for elders but also helps prevent displacement and the associated social and economic costs. It enables seniors to age in place, maintains neighborhood stability, and upholds the dignity of our older residents.

I urge you and other decision-makers to consider raising the income limit for senior property tax relief. By broadening eligibility, we can provide meaningful support to a greater number of seniors, allowing them to continue living in the homes and communities they cherish.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and for your commitment to our senior residents.

Sincerely,

Tina Fitzgerald

116 Roxboro Rd

Syracuse 13211

March 1, 2026 2, 2026

To the Legislators,

I would like to comment on the proposal to raise income limitations on seniors
To receive property tax breaks.

I have lived in Dewitt for seven years and lived in Manlius for 20 years before that.
In both towns I owned my own home. I could only manage to continue owning the properties
because I received the senior low-income tax reduction for the school districts.

My property taxes in Manlius from 2000 to 2018 ranged from \$2000 to \$4000 depending on
whether or not I qualified for the tax reduction. In all those years my adult son lived elsewhere
and no other children lived with me. Manlius conducted a census every year to determine
which households should pay for the huge high school and expensive programming.

Once in Dewitt I was surprised to experience an even-higher tax bill. My property taxes in eight
years have ranged from \$4000 to \$7000. The JD school district is specifically killing since the
school district still maintains an income level requirement higher than Manlius to get the school
tax reduction. With an income of \$32,000 in 2023 I got no reduction and paid the full school tax
of \$5000.

My income was a better income pre-covid while I still worked. However my income was only
about \$32,000 up to my retirement in 2016. Even for a few years after I retired my income was
supplemented by various items I disposed of and received cash for such as a vehicle.

It is humiliating to have to reveal all these figures but I know the Legislature does not care
about my worries, only the real numbers.

My income, which is derived from Social Security, NYS Pension and RMD has an AGI of \$8000
for 2025. I only survive in my own house because a family member pays my utility bill and food
costs for me. I cannot afford to put any money into my house for repairs and it deteriorates
year by year.

I certainly cannot afford to live in moderately priced affordable housing where the rental costs
increase every lease period. I still pay a mortgage in Dewitt and bank advisers have encouraged
me to stay in my house because I will never find housing in Onondaga County equal to my
mortgage payment. All housing is much costlier.

I hope it is sinking into you what it means to be 76 years old and live in Onondaga County.
Please adjust the income to a livable method for those of us on fixed and low incomes.