

Erie County Unveils New Name for Senior Services Department: "Department for the Aging"

Erie County, NY — Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz and Commissioner Randy Hoak proudly announced that the *Erie County Department of Senior Services* has officially been renamed the **Erie County Department for the Aging**, a milestone that represents not just a new name, but a renewed commitment to serving older adults with dignity, inclusion, and forward-thinking care.

The announcement was made during a press conference held at the historic Old County Hall, where county leaders unveiled the department's new name, branding, and messaging—initiatives carefully crafted to reduce stigma, promote clarity, and better reflect a modern vision of aging.

"This change is more than cosmetic," said County Executive Mark Poloncarz. "It reflects a deeper shift in how we talk about aging—with dignity, inclusiveness, and empowerment. The name *Department for the Aging* communicates our commitment to supporting older adults at every stage of the aging process."

Founded more than 50 years ago, the department has a rich history of serving Erie County's older adults through a wide spectrum of essential services—from nutrition assistance and transportation to caregiver support, elder advocacy, and home safety. Over the decades, it has grown in both scale and scope, adapting to the evolving needs of a diverse and dynamic aging population.

This revision was submitted under the leadership of former Commissioner **Angela Marinucci**, who played a vital role in setting the department on a forward-looking course. During her tenure, Commissioner Marinucci championed modernization efforts, expanded caregiver and elder justice programs, and prioritized community engagement and data-informed service delivery. She led the department with vision, compassion, and a strong commitment to equity—laying the groundwork for this rebranding effort to better align with the evolving needs of Erie County's aging population.

By 2030, it's estimated that more than 25% of Erie County residents will be over the age of 60. The department now serves tens of thousands of residents annually, offering a wide range of programs that include nutrition assistance, caregiver support, elder justice advocacy, home safety services, and more. Today, it actively serves over 16,000 individuals across Erie County and partners with 40 towns and municipalities, creating a robust network of local support systems that meet residents where they are.

A key priority of the newly rebranded Department for the Aging is to shift toward a more proactive, preventative approach—engaging with individuals well before they reach a point of crisis. Rather than waiting until someone is in immediate need, the department is increasing its focus on reaching adults approaching retirement age, as well as caregivers, to provide education, planning tools, and supportive services early on. "Too often, people discover us when they're already overwhelmed or it's nearly too late for certain interventions," said **Commissioner Hoak**. "We want to change that by being more visible, accessible, and active in the community—helping people take advantage of our programs sooner, when they can have the greatest impact." This includes strengthening outreach, hosting events in diverse neighborhoods, and collaborating with local agencies to reach younger ages groups, so that aging is approached with intention and preparation.

The department's updated name brings it into alignment with naming conventions used throughout New York State, where all county-level counterparts are similarly titled *Offices or Departments for the Aging*. It also mirrors national terminology, where local organizations serving older adults are known as Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). This consistency not only improves clarity and recognition but reinforces the department's role as a vital part of a statewide and nationwide aging services network.

A central element of the rebranding effort is the department's new logo and visual identity, which features a vibrant purplish-blue color palette—chosen to evoke energy, clarity, and trust. More than just a design, the new logo is rich with meaning: it represents a path, symbolizing how the department helps “put you on the right path” toward aging well and celebrating each individual journey older adults have experienced. The tree at the center of the logo reflects the powerful roots older adults have in our community, signifying stability, connection, and the deep contributions made across generations. The tree trunk, shaped as people, highlights the department's person-centered, holistic approach to aging. And the leaves at the top of the tree celebrate growth, vitality, and wellness, underscoring the department's role in helping older adults not just live longer—but live better.

The visual rebrand is also part of a broader mission: to reframe negative sentiments associated with aging and shift public perception toward one of pride, opportunity, and empowerment. Through inclusive language, modern imagery, and person-centered values, the Department for the Aging seeks to reflect aging as a lifelong journey worth celebrating—not simply managing.

Collaboration remains at the heart of the department's success. Internally, the Department for the Aging works closely with key Erie County divisions including Social Services, Adult Protective Services, the Department of Health, Mental Health, Veterans Services, Parks, and others—ensuring a coordinated and holistic approach to supporting older adults. Externally, the department partners with a robust network of nonprofit and community organizations such as the Center for Elder Law and Justice, People Inc., Catholic Charities, FeedMore WNY, Hearts and Hands, Erie County Medical Center (ECMC), the Alzheimer's Association of WNY, senior centers, and many grassroots agencies. These partners offer critical services—from legal advocacy and in-home care to transportation, nutrition, and social connection—that help older adults maintain safety, independence, and quality of life.

“This isn't about older adults—this is about all of us,” said Commissioner Randy Hoak. “The *Department for the Aging* is a name that embraces aging as a lifelong process. We want to support people not just when they're in crisis, but as they plan for vibrant, connected, healthy lives as they grow older.”

While the name has changed, officials emphasized that the department's mission remains unchanged—and is expanding. The Department for the Aging will continue to deliver high-quality programs and services that meet the growing and varied needs of Erie County's aging population

“This is about building a community that values and supports all of us as we age,” said Hoak. “With this new name, new look, and renewed purpose, we're celebrating older adults not as a separate group—but as the deeply rooted, ever-growing foundation of our entire community.”

For more information about services offered by the Erie County Department for the Aging, visit: www.erie.gov/aging or call 716-858-8526.