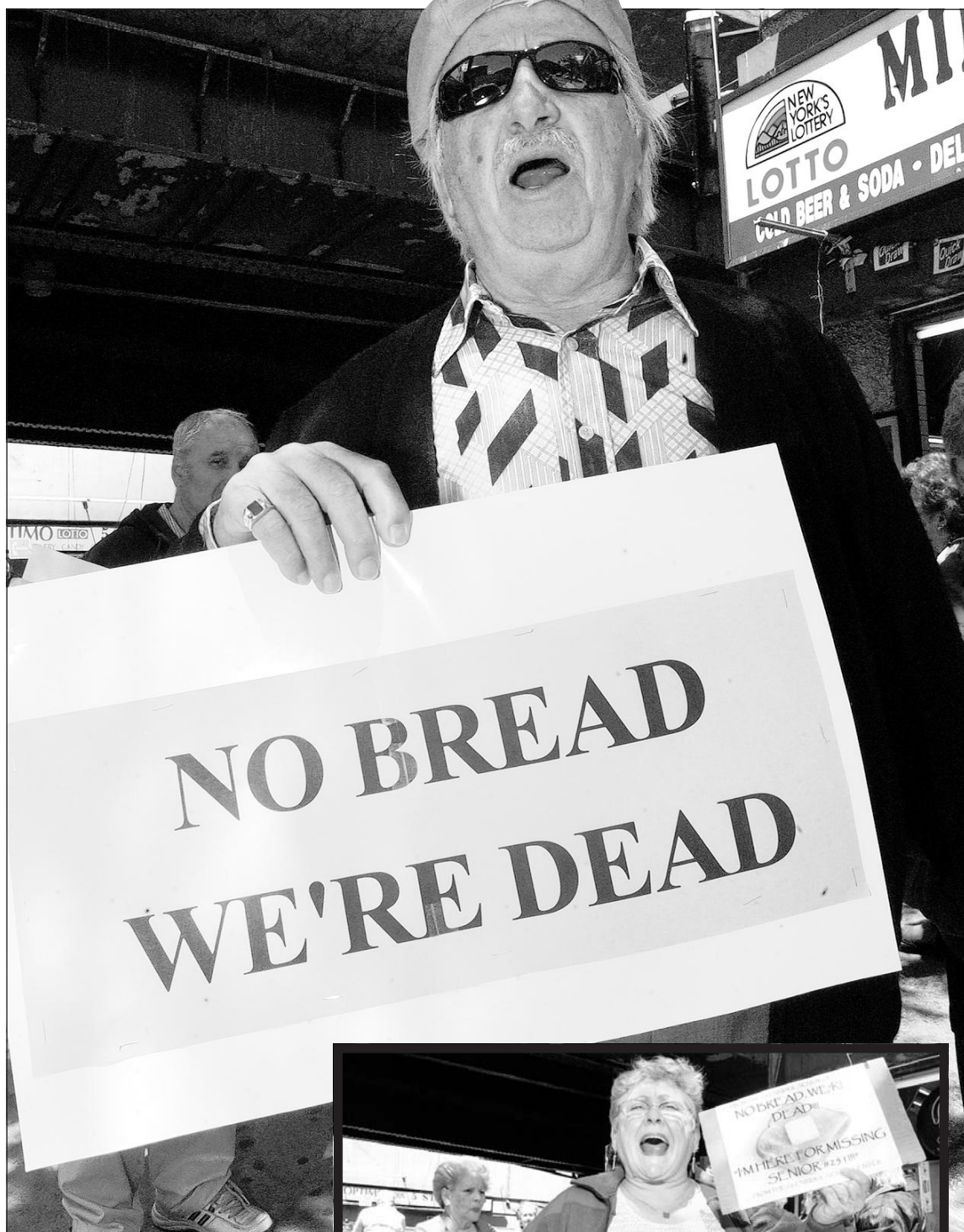


# Scrappy seniors fighting back



**Frank Tarrentello of the Glenridge Senior Center in Ridgewood holds a sign as protest against cuts in funding to senior centers and services. Ramona Diaz (r.) joins him.**

Photo by Christie M. Farriella



## Republicans pressured to protest cuts in services

BY LISA L. COLANGELO

ADVOCATES UNHAPPY with the city's sweeping plan to overhaul the way it provides services for seniors are now turning their attention to lawmakers in Albany.

Democratic state lawmakers have sponsored two bills that would slow down changes at the city Department for the Aging.

And senior citizens are pressuring local Republicans to sign onto the bills. Dozens of seniors from centers in Ridgewood and Glendale took their cause to local streets over the past two weeks — leafletting near the subway at Fresh Pond Road and outside a McDonald's on Cooper Ave.

The bills would require the city to evaluate a Bronx pilot plan that provides frozen meals on Wheels and also to gauge the impact of modernizing the services for seniors.

City Councilman James Vacca (D-Bronx) said he is concerned city officials cannot guarantee that all current senior centers will stay open under the restructuring plan.

"To close existing centers — when you look at the [aging] demographics — should not even be a thought," said Vacca, who chairs the Council's subcommittee on senior centers.

Seniors said the changes will be felt profoundly.

"Nobody wants frozen food," said John Christ, 73, who goes to

the Peter Cardella Senior Center in Ridgewood. "They deliver to people older than us. How are they going to cook food?"

Tom Keil, 80, of the Ridgewood Older Adult Center, said frozen meals should not be part of a modernization plan.

"We've walked on the moon and the best solution we can come up with is a frozen meal," he said.

Advocates have been pushing Republican state Sens. Frank Padavan and Serphin Maltese from Queens, as well as Martin Golden from Brooklyn, to sign onto the bills.

Maltese said he and his fellow GOP colleagues are working on their own version of a bill to preserve services to seniors. Republicans hold a majority in the state Senate, hence a

GOP-backed bill would have a better chance of being approved by the upper house.

"Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs sent me a letter guaranteeing that no senior will receive a frozen meal unless they ask for it," Maltese said. "She said there is no plan to diminish services for seniors."

But Maltese said he is concerned some centers considered underutilized may be closed.

"There aren't any underutilized centers in my district," Maltese said. "They are overutilized."

lcolangelo@nydailynews.com

**'There aren't any underutilized centers in my district. They are overutilized.'**

## Funding cuts for new mom programs raise anxiety again

BY LISA L. COLANGELO

WHEN 17-YEAR-OLD Vicki Quinto was pregnant, she took some major steps to take care of herself and her unborn child.

She went to the doctor and worked toward getting her high school equivalency diploma.

But she still needed help and guidance. She found both with Sandra Pratts, a case manager at Clergy United for Community Empowerment. Pratts helped Quinto with everything from scheduling medical tests to

finding a crib and baby clothes.

"I do whatever they need," Pratts said of Quinto and the many other clients she serves.

But funding for that program and others that help new moms and their babies is in jeopardy, advocates said during a recent news conference at Queens Borough Hall.

The Citywide Coalition to End Infant Mortality is urging city officials to restore \$4.8 million in the budget — including \$600,000 for Queens — for programs to prevent infant

mortality.

Since 2001, the mayor and the City Council have allocated funds for these programs as part of budget negotiations. But it is not automatically included. Advocates have to lobby every year to get the money, which also triggers matching state funding.

"We do a lot of work with that little bit of money," said Pamela Davis of the Queens Comprehensive Perinatal Council, part of the citywide coalition. "We really need even more than that."

Neighborhoods such as Bayside and Forest Hills have low infant mortality rates. But numbers are shockingly high in other parts of Queens, Davis noted.

In Rockaway, there were 7.4 deaths per 1,000 births in 2006 — much higher than the citywide average of 5.9, according to the Health Department. The rate in St. Albans and Jamaica was 6.9; it was 6.3 in Jackson Heights.

The Health Department funds the Nurse Family Partnership Program,

geared to first-time mothers in all five boroughs. The agency also has the Newborn Home Visiting Program, which provides new moms in parts of Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan with a visit from a Health Department worker.

That makes the smaller programs such as Pratts' in Queens even more important, said Davis.

And they work, she said, pointing to examples such as Quinto, who gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Jocelyn in March.

lcolangelo@nydailynews.com