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**Before the New York State Division of the Budget**

**Public Hearing for Fiscal Year 2008-09 New York State Budget**

**November 29, 2007**

Good afternoon. My name is Anthony Ng, and I am the Deputy Director of Policy and Advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses of New York, Inc. (UNH). UNH, founded in 1919, is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 34 agencies working at more than 400 sites to provide high quality services and activities to a half million New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy and capacity-building activities. Services provided by our members include: early childhood education, after-school programs, teen centers, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, immigration legal services, GED classes, job training, tutoring, recreation, meals and supportive services for the elderly, mental health counseling, drug prevention, and art, music and drama programs.

As I testify today on UNH's priorities for the 2008-09 State budget, we recognize that the budget outlook is not as robust as in prior years. We know that tax revenues have slowed due to projected declines in the financial and real estate sectors, which could reduce State spending. However, we must continue to invest in critical programs to support New York's communities. We appreciate your consideration of these programs, urge that no funding cuts are made to existing programs, and will be grateful for any new or increased investments to keep our communities strong.

**Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**

**Include at least \$35 million in the 2008-09 Executive Budget for SYEP.**

Since December 1999, United Neighborhood Houses and the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition have co-coordinated the Campaign for Summer Jobs, a coalition of nearly 100 citywide and community based organizations that work annually to ensure adequate funding for the summer youth employment program (SYEP). We thank Governor Spitzer for his strong leadership on SYEP, by including \$35 million for summer jobs in his Fiscal Year 2007-08 Executive budget. The Governor's action was met with strong support from the New York State Legislature and included in the adopted Fiscal Year 2007-08 State budget. As a result of adequate and early funding for SYEP, youth and families could plan well ahead of time for their summer. We also want to thank Commissioner David Hansell and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) for their diligent work administering summer jobs programs in

partnership with counties across the State and with our very own Department of Youth and Community Development here in New York City.

Based on our calculations, the \$35 million in State funding directly supported about 20,000 jobs. In New York City, State funding was combined with City and Federal funds to total over \$56 million, and enabled the City's 2007 summer youth employment program to enroll nearly 42,000 teenagers, who worked up to 25 hours a week for 7 weeks, earning the State minimum wage of \$7.15. Included in their hours were 17 hours of workshops on financial literacy, health, college and career preparation, etc. SYEP continues to help our young people gain valuable work experience, prepare for careers and become our future workforce. Teens also gain a sense of fulfillment earning income for themselves and their families, and learn about saving and budgeting their money. In addition, the wages earned help them pay for clothes, school supplies and other goods and services, which contribute to the local economy where these purchases are made.

While the City's 2007's SYEP was a very successful one, the demand for SYEP continues to be tremendous. About 93,000 young people in New York City applied for a summer job, which was about a 30 percent increase in the number of applications from 2006. Essentially, less than 1 in 2 young people that applied were selected for a job. **In the long term, we urge for the investment of funding that can provide an SYEP job for every young person who applies for one and that is ready to work.** Holding a summer job continues to be a vital workforce development and youth development strategy for our teens and it is critical for their future success.

### **Disconnected Youth**

In New York City, approximately 170,000 young adults ages 16 to 24 are not in school, or participating in the labor force. About half do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, and almost all of these young adults have insufficient skills with little or no work experience. Statewide, the number of disconnected youth is even higher. However, these young adults are not beyond hope, and with the right combination of supports, opportunities, and services, disconnected youth can transform their lives. Given some help, motivation, training, and time, these young adults can complete high school or a GED, enter a training program, have an internship or stipended first job, and embark on to college or a career.

In the coming decades, the combination of industry growth and an aging workforce will produce sizeable new openings in the labor market. Young adults with the skills to compete for these jobs will be well positioned to seize this opportunity, obtain employment, and contribute to their families and the larger economy – to become “tomorrow's workforce.” **Every young adult can contribute to our society, and we cannot afford to waste any of their energy, talent, and potential.** For this to happen, developing solutions must be a top priority for New York. Towards this end, we at UNH, along with the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition and Community Service Society have launched the **Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce.** Our Campaign's objective is to advance public policy, legislative, and programmatic solutions, transform existing policies, and urge for the increased investment needed to build and sustain a coordinated, high-quality, at-scale system of programs and services to prepare “disconnected” young adults ages 16-24, to succeed in the future workforce.

## **Build services for disconnected youth.**

There is a desperate need throughout the State for services and programs for disconnected youth. While there are some effective programs in place, they are dwarfed by the need for them. A new initiative must be created, where education, job training, workplace readiness and career development services will be tailored to each participant's unique circumstances and skill levels. In addition, stipended and paid work experiences, wrap-around supportive services and ongoing case management are essential for helping young adults enter the workforce. The average cost per participant of such programs is about \$10,000 per year. It is important to make this multi-year investment, to help young adults build the education and work skills they need to engage in New York's economic and civic life. Future investment must also reach the segment of this population who see the greatest gap in services, which are older teens with literacy levels below a seventh grade level.

## **Invest \$10 million to increase the number of Out of School Youth served by the State's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth programs.**

New York State's Department of Labor is beginning to implement the Federal Common Measures that are applicable to WIA programs, and which support the expansion of programs for out-of-school youth (OSY). An investment of \$10 million in State funding will expand the number of OSY who can be served without having this expansion come at the expense of WIA in-school youth programs. Increasing the eligibility of WIA-OSY programs to age 24 will also help to increase services.

## **Immigrant Services**

## **Invest \$100 million in a multi-year effort to increase the number of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) classes, citizenship services, and legal services for immigrants.**

As New York State's immigrant population continues to grow, the demand for the services that help immigrants integrate into society continues to increase. Immigrant New Yorkers want to learn English, become U.S. citizens, and need the legal services to support their efforts at applying for citizenship.

### **The High Demand for ESOL Classes**

Indeed, improving one's English skills is a key strategy for immigrants to better integrate into life in New York City and the U.S., making the importance of ESOL programs very clear. When immigrant New Yorkers speak better English they can obtain jobs with better pay, better benefits, and a career ladder; increase participation in our democracy by being equipped to contribute to civic and community life. ESOL classes also help recent immigrants live more independent and confident lives. For example, with better English skills one may feel more comfortable on public transportation; interacting more closely with their children's teachers; running errands within one's neighborhood.

ESOL programs also assist our State's workforce development and economic development efforts<sup>1</sup>. Immigrant New Yorkers with good literacy skills can better communicate with employers, co-workers, and customers. They are more employable, and provide a labor pool to fill jobs in the growing sectors of our economy – retail, customer service, healthcare,

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<sup>1</sup> In November 2006, The Center for an Urban Future and Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy released a report entitled "Lost in Translation," that details the important relationship between improved English skills amongst immigrants and a more prepared workforce for New York State in the decades to come.

construction, and small business. Immigrants that attend ESOL classes at multi-service community based organizations (CBOs) like UNH members, may also utilize childcare, citizenship programs, immigration legal services, afterschool programs, and senior programs. It's also possible that immigrants may come for these human services first, and then learn that they can also take an ESOL class. Either way, ESOL classes are often leveraged with other human services to meet the needs of the student, and help further their socioeconomic opportunities.

Nearly three-quarters (3/4) of UNH members offer ESOL and or other adult literacy classes. Several of our members also help immigrants become more literate in their native language first, speeding their ability to improve their English. UNH members report that demand for ESOL classes remains high, and has been high for many years now. One UNH member in Queens serves about 2,700 people annually, offering instruction at five different English proficiency levels, yet they are forced to turn away almost 1,000 people each year due to inadequate funding for additional ESOL classes. It is also common to hear about ESOL programs:

- Holding lotteries to accept students.
- Discontinue using waiting lists because the number of students that desire a class is so great.
- Refrain from doing outreach when a new cycle of classes begins. Programs don't want to be overwhelmed with students who can't get into classes that quickly fill up.

A review of 2000 and 2005 U.S. Census data explains why UNH members and other ESOL providers in face such high demand for their programs -- about a quarter of New York City's adults -- about 1.23 million -- have inadequate English skills<sup>2</sup>. However the resources to fund ESOL classes have not kept pace with demand and meet less than 5 percent of the need. Only 62,467 students are enrolled in government funded literacy programs, with about two-thirds in ESOL programs and the remaining 1/3 in adult basic education, and GED programs.<sup>3</sup>

### Citizenship and Legal Services

In the upcoming year, immigrants will be facing new challenges to attaining U.S. citizenship, such as the introduction of a redesigned citizenship exam in 2008 and increased application fees that have already been enacted. Fueled by these changes and rumors of changing federal immigration law, immigrants have been applying for citizenship with a renewed urgency. Naturalization applications in New York State have gone up 77% from 86,173 in FY2006 to 112,482 in FY2007. In New York City, naturalization applications filed through programs that depend on funding from the Department of Youth and Community Development have gone up 65%, from almost four thousand in FY2006 to over six thousand in FY2007. The redesigned naturalization exam will also make English instruction with a civics component and test preparation even more crucial in helping one pass the exam.

Applying for citizenship also requires legal assistance and guidance in completing the application forms, preparing for the naturalization interview, and the chance that legal representatives may accompany applicants to the naturalization interviews. Moreover, as citizenship application fees have doubled, more naturalization applicants are seeking fee waivers, which require additional legal assistance to complete.

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<sup>2</sup> Center for an Urban Future and Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. "Lost in Translation," p.4. Inadequate English skills are defined as adults ages 18-64 that speak English less than very well.

<sup>3</sup> Literacy Assistance Center. This includes funding administered by the NYS Dept. of Education (SED) -- WIA Title II, EPE, WEP, and ALE. **In 2006, SED administered over \$54 million of this funding to NYC.** Enrollment figures for ESOL and adult basic education programs supported by City tax levy dollars and the Community Services Block Grant are not included.

## **Youth Development Programs**

### **Invest \$30 million to support youth development and afterschool programs.**

Youth development programs are an important component of the programs and services that our member agencies offer. Every UNH member operates some type of youth program, reaching almost 50,000 elementary, middle, and high school aged youth each year. Youth development programs offer academic, social, recreational, music and arts activities that stimulate a young person's development, and aid in their school success.

Several UNH members utilize State funding for their programs, such as Advantage After-School and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC). Both Advantage and 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC have strong accountability measures. For example, programs funded under 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC must report a wide range of data to SED, including student attendance, student results on state tests, program details like hours of operation, and staffing details like staff turnover. These programs are also popular, and the demand for them is high, as they serve tens of thousand of young people throughout the State. In addition, the last Advantage request for proposals (RFP) saw more than 400 applicants for the \$3.4 million in funding available, but only about 40 applicants received funding. We also expect that the cohort two 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC RFP that will be released shortly, will have a huge increase in the number of applicants, since there was not an RFP released for the cohort one 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs; and we understand that cohort two's RFP will be down by about \$10 million, making it only a \$30 million procurement.

Long term, we support a coordinated system of youth development and after-school programs in New York State, and are open to exploring consolidation to advance this purpose.. These programs receive funding from a range of state and federal funding sources and is overseen by two state departments (SED and the Office of Children and Family Services). Youth and after-school programs should be more effectively coordinated, and a long-term policy and funding strategy should be developed. **Coordination MUST be combined with a long-term investment** as other states like California are doing. Our \$30 million request is a first step towards that long-term investment.

UNH is also a member of the NYC Youth Alliance (NYCYA). We support the testimony of our colleagues in the Youth Alliance, and have attached NYCYA's 2008-09 State Budget agenda. It details the specific increases in youth development funding that comprise our total \$30 million request.

## **Child Care**

Children must have a safe and nurturing environment to lead healthy and secure lives. All children should have access to quality care and early education programs to thrive in a safe and developmentally stimulating environment. Services must engage children and their families during these formative years so that they are able to enter school, ready to learn.

### **Expand funds for child care programs and services.**

The child care block grant funding has been on a significant decline for the last several years. Also, the new market rate for child care will require additional funds to cover these costs. In New York City alone, an estimated \$28 million annually will be needed to fund this rate increase.

We urge a \$140 increase in child care subsidies. This would ensure appropriate funding for current programs and expand child care for low-income families. Adequate funding for child care for working families must be a state priority in 2008.

**Allow school districts the flexibility to use Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) funds.**

To assure high quality pre-kindergarten, school districts need the flexibility to spend UPK funding to adequately fund full- and part-day programs in schools and in community based organizations. In addition, the rate per child must be increased to reflect the actual cost of providing care so that funding levels can increase to retain certified teachers. These changes will enable programs to more effectively meet the needs of children and families.

**Expand investments in UPK to strengthen the work already begun last year.**

Over the past several years much attention has been given to the importance of early education activities that support good educational outcomes for children when they begin school. In fact research has shown that early brain development plays a large role in determining a person's overall intellect. Investing in UPK is a great way to invest in our children's future.

**Repeal the regulation requiring parents to present court-ordered child support documentation.**

Requiring families who receive child care subsidies to pursue court-ordered child support agreements as a condition to receive child care assistance or lose eligibility is wrong. In NYC, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) encourages parents to pay child support. However, the current regulation creates an undue barrier to child care assistance for families headed by single-parents (the regulation does not apply to two-parent families), immigrants, and teen-age parents. Too often, these regulations act as a barrier and prevent parents from applying for child care assistance. Unfortunately children must then be placed in alternative child care arrangements that are neither safe nor stable.

**Aging Services**

In 2000, older New Yorkers comprised 16.9 percent of the state population. In 2025, the elder population will increase to comprise 22.2 percent of the population, numbering 4.4 million. Older adults need a continuum of services to support their well being spanning over forty years and through the next stages of their life. These services must include health and wellness activities, socialization, continuing education and cultural programs. Advanced older adults and the physically frail will need to rely on transportation, home care services, meal delivery and friendly visiting programs to remain living within and connected to their communities.

**Increase funding for transportation services for older adults by \$8 million to reach a total of \$10 million to enhance transportation services for older adults.**

The growing older population in New York will be increasingly independent and living in communities. They will remain active and engaged community members and in order to do so, older New Yorkers will require accessible transportation options that meet their varying needs.

**Expand funds for Geriatric Mental Health programs and services by \$2 million for a total of \$4.5 million.**

Older adults with mental health needs are currently underserved and will be increasingly so. The mental health system is not prepared to serve this growing population. As a result, many may end up losing their independence and ability to live at home and in communities to adult homes and nursing facilities that can't guarantee adequate care for them. Community-based aging and mental health services need expansion.

**Invest \$2 million to establish neighborhood-based supportive service program models.**

This investment can establish a demonstration project for neighborhood-based services that support older adults living independently in the community. The overwhelming majority of older adults wish to remain living in their homes and neighborhoods as they age. The high cost of nursing home placement, an increase in the number of older adults aging alone, and new regulations is hastening this change. As such, older New Yorkers will be increasingly reliant on supportive services in the community. Services such as household and home maintenance services, preferred access to social and cultural activities, exercise opportunities, as well as medical care and assisted living in the home.

**Cost-of-living adjustments for human service contracts**

**Maintain the current multi-year cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to the human services sector, with an extension of an additional three years to prevent a lag in the provision of COLAs to this critical sector. Extend COLAs to a few key programs that have been overlooked.**

UNH members always face the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified staff to work with our clients is one of the most difficult challenges we face. With few additional resources available for salaries, non-profit community-based organizations continually experience high turnover among employees, which impede the delivery of quality services, and result in efficiency losses. When a program has a high turnover rate, it suffers from indirect costs that result from reduced supervision, employee burnout, and the learning curves of new employees, as well as the direct costs, which include expenditures on overtime pay and job advertisements.

Additionally, non-profits are losing staff to employers that are able to provide salaries that have kept up with the rate of inflation. These employers include City and State agencies, 1199 and other unionized contracted agencies, hospitals, and other for-profit companies with similar career paths and educational attainment requirements. It is imperative that non-profits are able to offer COLAs to their workers, allowing them to remain competitive in the job market and ensure that services are delivered efficiently and produce the best outcomes.

**Extension of Current COLAs**

Recognizing the importance of regular adjustments, we are grateful the FY07-08 Enacted Budget supported the continuation of multi-year COLAs for a number of social service programs. We offer the following recommendations for the continuation of these important COLAs:

- A continuation of the current COLAs should be reset to the most recent CPI and reset each subsequent year.
- Providers should receive 100% of COLAs, indexed exactly to the CPI. In some areas, the full amount of the enacted COLA was not passed on to providers.

- Implementation flexibility must be maintained. Providers as well as City and State agencies agree that the current COLA was executed easily and efficiently because the implementation guidelines were not overly cumbersome.

#### Additional COLA Needs

While we are thankful for the many service areas already covered, several key areas did not benefit from the FY06-07 Enacted Budget adjustments. To ensure that workers across the human services sector are treated equitably, the following additional program areas necessitate COLA investments this year, in addition to the continuation of the current COLAs in future years:

- Runaway and Homeless Youth, Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention, and Special Delinquency Prevention programs.
- Social Adult Day Care and NORCs.
- SRO and Family Homeless Services (state match).

Additionally, Early Intervention (EI) programs have not received the first two years of the three-year COLA that was approved in the FY06-07 budget. COLAs should be provided to EI programs for the past two fiscal years, as well as the current year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We look forward to working with you in the upcoming year regarding our budget priorities and to ensure that New York's communities remain vibrant.

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*UNH Members: CAMBA-Center for Family Life in Sunset Park - Chinese American Planning Council - Citizens Advice Bureau - Claremont Neighborhood Centers - Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation - East Side House Settlement - Educational Alliance - Queens Community House (formerly the Forest Hills Community House) - Goddard Riverside Community Center - Grand Street Settlement - Greenwich House - Hamilton-Madison House - Hartley House - Henry Street Settlement - Hudson Guild - Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House - Kingsbridge Heights Community Center - Lenox Hill Neighborhood House - Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center - Moshulu Montefiore Community - Riverdale Neighborhood House - SCAN New York - School Settlement Association - Shorefront YM-WHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc - Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers - St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center - St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation - Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center - Sunnyside Community Services - Third Street Music School Settlement - Union Settlement Association - United Community Centers - University Settlement Society*

#### Attachments:

- New York City Youth Alliance 2008-09 State Budget Agenda