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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York State Senate  
And New York State Assembly  
Joint Legislative Hearing on Human Services  
in the New York State FY 2012-2013 Budget**

**Honorable John DeFrancisco, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance  
Honorable Herman D Farrell, Chair, Assembly Committee on Ways & Means  
Honorable Patrick Gallivan, Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services  
Honorable Diane Savino, Chair, Senate Committee on Children & Families  
Honorable Michele Titus, Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services  
Honorable Amy Paulin, Chair, Assembly Committee Children & Families**

**February 13, 2012**

Good Afternoon. Thanks you Chairs DeFrancisco, Farrell, Gallivan, Savino, Titus and Paulin for the opportunity to testify. My name is Annetta Seecharran and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses. United Neighborhood Houses (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 37 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, meals and supportive services for seniors, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, immigration legal services, GED classes, job training, tutoring, recreation, mental health counseling, drug prevention, and art, music and drama programs.

I am grateful for the legislature's commitment to human services. In last year's budget, the legislature fought proposals that would have devastated the low-income communities we serve including new sanctions on public assistance recipients and changes to Title XX funding that would have led to the closure of senior centers in New York City.

Human services remain a wise and crucial investment. UNH's member agencies are embedded in their communities and promote stable and safe neighborhoods.- they are economic engines. We are a major employer of local residents and some of our former participants are now our current employees. Many of our staff have reached adulthood with the help of the stabilizing framework provided by our services, and now we serve as that stabilizing force for a new generation.

Our agencies partner with the State, New York City and the Federal government to "stretch a buck," running effective and efficient programs of demonstrable value. They raise over \$50 million in private donations from foundations and individuals to leverage the impact of their government-funded programs.

The recent closure of one of America's first settlement houses, Hull House in Chicago, has shown us that even strong agencies with a proven history are at risk when government support for the human services declines. We must preserve the core services that meet the needs of the communities we serve. We need New York State to make the investments necessary to support and expand the services that keep communities strong. Below are several proposals to strengthen human services in New York State FY 2012-2013 budget.

➤ **Restore the Settlement House Initiative**

The Settlement House Initiative supports the multi-service neighborhood based model by providing a funding stream which lets settlement houses creatively find solutions to unmet needs and fill in gaps in government and philanthropic support.

Settlement House funding is one of the few funding streams that allows providers to design programs to meet specific neighborhood needs. For eighteen years, settlement houses have used the Settlement House Initiative funding to support and create critical programs that respond to the specific needs of unique neighborhoods such as: An eviction prevention program which keeps more than 100 families per year living in safe, affordable housing, an intake and referral service for immigrant youth requiring medical services, HIV information, mental health counseling, and drug prevention, English vocabulary enhancement in after school programs for five and six year old English Language Learners, a paratransit driver for an adult day program serving seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's disease and a Volunteer Director who oversees more than 600 unpaid volunteers working with low-income children and older adults, English language learners, and mentally ill women in homeless shelters. Without the Settlement House Initiative, important programs like these would go unfunded.

Funding for the Settlement House Initiative was zeroed out in the Governor's Executive Budget Proposal. UNH urges New York State to restore \$2 million for the Settlement House Initiative.

➤ **Strengthen Universal Pre-Kindergarten**

New York State funded Universal Pre-Kindergarten provides crucial educational opportunities for 4 year olds, regardless of income, across New York State. Our investment

in UPK gives many of our children a solid grounding in early literacy and early math. However, we must work to make Universal Pre-Kindergarten a truly universal program that can serve all out children and their families.

Therefore, we urge the legislature to enact the New York State Board of Regents proposal to increase UPK by \$53 million in FY 2012-2013. This funding can go directly to increasing slots so that more families can get their children off of waiting lists and into classes.

We also urge New York State to allow flexible use of UPK funding so that districts can create full day UPK classes in both schools and community based organizations. Many children cannot participate in UPK because their parents cannot drop them off and pick them up for a daytime class that is only 2.5 hours. Creating more full day classes will make it possible for more children from working families to access UPK.

➤ **Restore \$5.4 Million for Advantage After-School**

**Advantage After-School** provides flexible funding for after school and youth development programs for school-age youth. After school programs offer an **important workforce support for parents** and provide youth with **safe places to go** after the school day ends, as well as educational, recreational, and cultural programming that helps with closing the achievement gap, and encourages their success.

The FY 2012-2013 State Budget proposes funding at \$17.2 Million, which reduces Advantage After School by \$5.4 million from FY 2010-11 and **eliminates another 4,320 after school slots (\$1250 per slot) as well as 430 adult jobs (1 adult is required for every 10 kids).** The demand for after school programs in New York is enormous. According to the Afterschool Alliance, 46 percent of all children (1.1 million) in New York State not in after school would like to participate if a program were available in their community. At a time when youth violence is on the rise and working parents are struggling to retain their jobs, and meet household expenses, after school programs are needed more than ever.

➤ **Restore \$14.12 Million to Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (YDDP) and Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP)**

Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention and Special Delinquency Prevention Program provide funding for after-school programs throughout the state for in-school youth. **The FY2011-2012 Executive Budget reduced funding by 50% which eliminated thousands of after-school seats.** The demands for these services are surging, and budget cutbacks are forcing programs to serve more program participants with fewer resources and staff. YDDP is managed at the local level by county youth bureaus and provides opportunities for positive youth development. SDPP is a direct grant from OCFS and supports services aimed at keeping youth from becoming involved in the juvenile justice

system or dependent on other areas of the NYS social service system. We urge New York State to reinvest in youth and restore funding to YDDP and SDPP.

In New York City, Out of School Time (OST), the largest system of publicly funded after school is partially supported with YDDP funds. This program now faces the loss of 25,000 seats for after-school, more than 50% of program capacity. We need for both the State and the City to act in order to preserve after-school programs for children and youth.

➤ **Add \$10 Million in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)**

Two weeks ago, more than 250 young people got on early morning buses all around New York City to come to Albany to talk about the importance of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP).

For over 40 years, SYEP has provided summer jobs to hundreds of thousands of New York's teens. Through SYEP, youth between the ages of 14 and 24 can work up to seven weeks over the summer for approximately 25 hours per week at minimum wage. Youth work in a variety of community supporting positions including summer day camps and cultural institutions as well as professional offices and retail shops.

Summer employment teaches teens **valuable professional and life skills**, including responsibility, time and money management, and meeting workplace expectations. In addition, SYEP allows youth to **explore career options** and help **support their families**. Since youth typically spend the majority of their paychecks in their communities, **their salaries stimulate local economies**.

In 2009, \$35 million in State SYEP funding provided jobs for over 23,000 teens statewide. The FY 2012-13 Executive Budget includes \$25 million, which while greater than FY2011, will **only provide jobs for about 16,600 teens**. This is troubling given that **New York State ranked in the bottom ten states nationwide for summer teen employment, with over 75% of teens being unemployed**. The demand for SYEP is tremendous and the current record-high youth unemployment rates in New York and across the nation point to the need for increased investment in this proven program. **Last year in New York City, over 131,000 young people applied for less than 31,000 summer jobs**.

➤ **Bring Eviction Prevention Back to New York City**

Eviction prevention programs, formerly known as the Homelessness Intervention Program and the Supplemental Homelessness Intervention Program which are now part of Solutions to end Homelessness Programs (STEHP), provide services to New Yorkers who face

homelessness but because of their family status or previous income level, do not qualify for services that have strict eligibility guidelines attached to them. Many New Yorkers who have never before experienced poverty now face evictions or foreclosures as a result of the economic downturn. It is crucial that New York State support programs that help these residents stay in their homes and communities.

Services provided through eviction prevention include conflict resolution between landlords and tenants, anti-eviction legal services, educational activities pertaining to tenants' rights and responsibilities, and advocacy to ensure that households receive assistance securing and maintaining permanent housing. In addition, eviction prevention allows for the provision of or referral to supportive services related to substance abuse and domestic violence prevention, budgeting, education, daycare, employment, parenting, and physical and mental health care.

In the recent rebidding of SHIP, no provider in NYC was chosen. UNH urges New York State to provide funds for eviction prevention in New York City.

➤ **Restore \$1.5 million for NYC FEPS Application Preparation Assistance (FAPA)**

NYC FEPS Application Preparation Assistance, formerly known as the Homelessness Prevention Program, helps New Yorkers obtain ongoing rental subsidies that keep families in their homes and out of shelters. Although demand and program utilization have continued to rise, this program has been cut in the last several budget cycles. UNH urges New York State to restore \$1.5 million to FAPA.

➤ **Fully Fund NORC's**

Last week, UNH testified at the Health and Medicaid Budget hearing, urging the legislature to restore funding to Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs, bringing the total funding up to the FY08-9 level of \$2.2 million for each program. NORCs and Neighborhood NORCs are innovative and irreplaceable community resources that directly impact a senior's ability to age in his or her own home. Fully funding this program strengthens the infrastructure of the community based long term care network. Given the surge in the senior population and the changes currently taking place in Medicaid funded long-term care, it is critical that we strengthen this infrastructure now.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with you on behalf of New York's communities.