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**TESTIMONY of KIMBERLEIGH J. SMITH  
Vice President, Policy & Advocacy**

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on SFY 2015-16 Executive Budgets  
Topic: Housing**

**February 5, 2015**

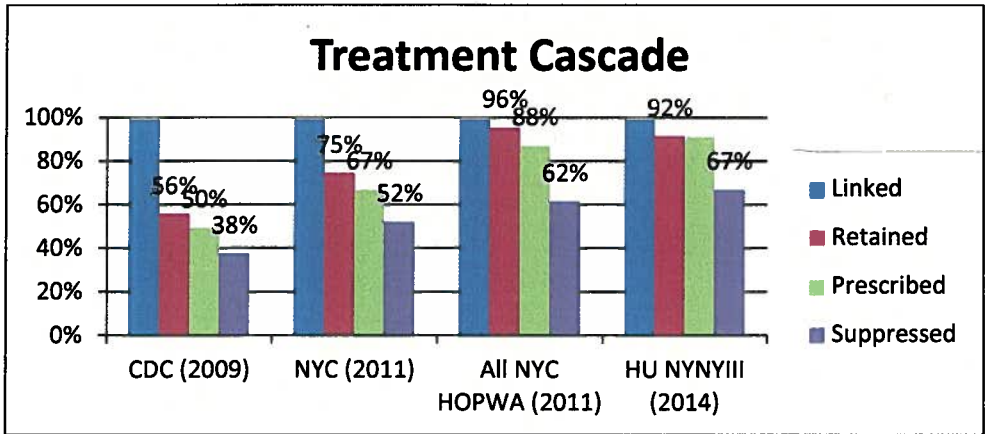
Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Kimberleigh Joy Smith, and I am the Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at Harlem United. Harlem United is vastly experienced in providing critical health, housing and human service to people with multiple needs. With 625 units of supportive housing, 3,000 primary care visits a year to our Federally-Qualified Healthcare Center, adult day health services, mental health, harm reduction, community-based outreach and preventive screenings, Harlem United is able to “level the playing field” for more than 15,000 New Yorkers each year. Many of these New Yorkers are among the most economically disenfranchised individuals – homeless or unstably housed, living with HIV and AIDS, Hepatitis C, Diabetes, extreme poverty, substance use, and mental illness. We serve the most vulnerable citizens of New York and are, for many, the service provider of last resort.

Harlem United applauds the Legislature for maintaining the current funding levels for supportive housing. With almost 60,000 homeless in NYS, the crisis facing us has never been greater. I offer testimony today on the importance of supportive housing. Specifically, I'd like to focus on housing and supportive housing as a means to end AIDS and eradicate poverty.

Supportive housing is a relatively low-cost intervention of providing housing combined with patient-centered care that links high-needs individuals and families with health,



behavioral health and support services. Harlem United knows firsthand that supportive housing can reduce the number and length of hospital stays, the number of emergency room visits, and the number of psychiatric hospitalizations. **Housing is healthcare.**



Reaching HIV positive individuals with routine testing, linking and retaining them in care to achieve suppressed viral load – which, in turn, brings health benefits for the individual client and drastically reduces the risk of transmission to others - is referred to as the treatment cascade. NY/NY III has shown tremendous success in improving this cascade. Viral suppression for the clients in NY/NY III from 2011 to 2013 nearly doubled. More than 90 percent of our tenants in NY/NY III in December 2014 were linked to care and 67 percent are virally suppressed. In 2013, 84% of our housing clients had a least one primary care visit every six months. **Supportive housing saves lives.**

The Governor’s ambitious and exciting Bending the Curve initiative – his plan to end AIDS in New York State by 2020 - coupled with the State’s housing resources provides for us an unprecedented opportunity to support and grow the State’s investment in supportive housing, moving us toward an end to AIDS and an eradication of poverty.

Harlem United submits the following recommendations toward that end:

### **Reinvest in human services, including supportive housing**

In a recent *Albany Times Union* op-ed, then Assemblyman Karim Camara, who has now assumed the position of Executive Director of the Office of Faith-Based Development Services, observed that the state's \$5.4 billion bank settlement represented a golden opportunity for the state to reinvest in human services. In a letter to the editor published January 25<sup>th</sup> in the Sunday Opinion page (Perspective) of the *Albany Times Union*, Harlem United's Chief Executive Officer, Jacquelyn Kilmer, agreed. Healthcare, housing and supportive services are necessary variables in the equation to eradicate poverty. The Governor's \$50 million proposed investment toward non-profit infrastructure is inadequate and represents little more than 10 percent of the surplus. Harlem United urges that this investment be significantly bolstered to support non-profit infrastructure and human services (including housing).

### **Expand New York/New York IV (NY Urban)**

While we support Governor Cuomo's ambitious Opportunity Agenda, which includes investing \$183 million to support to create a (new) NY/NY IV, we urge an increase in new supportive housing units from 5,000 to 20,000. Without a robust commitment to create more supportive housing, New York runs the risk of curtailing the very progress we have made with NY/NY III over the last 12 years. In order to make a dent in the homeless population, we need 15,000 new units in NYC and 5,000 units upstate over 10 years.

In addition, the appropriation of New York City for homelessness services is a step in the right direction, but more is needed to truly address the growing homelessness problem. A one-time commitment to build supportive housing must come with an ongoing commitment to provide for the services and operating funds necessary to make affordable housing truly supportive and successful.

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance has been at the forefront of addressing homelessness through three operating and services programs funded last fiscal year at \$30.3 million. The 2015-2016 Executive budgets propose a

slight increase of only \$400,000. With our partners at the Supportive Housing Network of New York, we request: \$3 million for the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP); and increase in the Solutions to End Homelessness Program (STEHP) by \$5 million in addition to an increase of \$8 million to the Operational Support for AIDS Housing (OSAH) program.

### **End AIDS in New York by 2020 and Eradicate Poverty**

Finally, as a member of the Governor's Ending the Epidemic Task Force, which recently completed its charge to deliver a blueprint to end AIDS in New York State by 2020, Harlem United wholeheartedly endorses the housing recommendations that were approved by the Task Force, including, but not limited to:

1. To provide statewide access to enhanced housing, transportation and nutritional assistance to low-income, HIV+ regardless of AIDS diagnoses in local social service districts in, and outside of, NYC.
2. Make 30% rent cap affordable housing protection available statewide, including affordable housing protection for rent-burdened people living with HIV on SSDI and as a bridge to work for low-income people living with HIV at \$15 million in Year One.
3. Expand housing options for homeless youth, including LGBT youth at \$4.7 million annually

### **Conclusion**

New York has led the nation in proving that supportive housing is the permanent solution for homelessness and other housing instability. Harlem United values the critical role the Legislature plays in this effort. You are true partners. We urge you to continue to invest in, and elevate, supportive housing as a means to these ambitious – but reachable – goals.

Thank you. For more information, please feel free to contact me directly at 212-803-2890 or [ksmith@harlemunited.org](mailto:ksmith@harlemunited.org).