

**Testimony**  
**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services**  
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**Submitted by**  
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Good afternoon to Chairs Weinstein and Krueger and the members of the Assembly Ways & Means and Senate Finance Committees. I am Beatriz Diaz Taveras, Executive Director of Catholic Charities Community Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

For over 70 years, Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) has provided comprehensive, professional human services to vulnerable, low-income City residents in the poorest communities of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Its network of services enables a participant in any of our programs to access a continuum of services which include: case management services to help people resolve financial, emotional and family issues; long-term disaster case management services; eviction and homelessness prevention; emergency food; immigration legal services; refugee resettlement; ESOL services; after-school programs at summer camps and community centers; and supportive housing programs for adults with serious mental illness. Through its programs, CCCS serves thousands of individuals each year without regard to race, ethnicity, gender or religion.

While the issues facing vulnerable New Yorkers preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting economic fallout, and environmental crises such as Hurricane Ida, these events have dramatically impacted the human services sector and the communities we serve. Addressing the realities of inequality, lack of opportunity, and exclusion is already embedded in Catholic Charities' work and is the context within which our advocacy work will be conducted in 2022 and beyond.

Within this context, we would like to bring your attention to the following items:

**Sustaining & Strengthening Human Service Provider Agencies:**

New York engages a broad range of private non-profit agencies – large, small, faith-based and other – to meet critical human service needs. These partnerships are an efficient and effective use of public funds to meet the needs of millions of vulnerable New Yorkers. Increased funding constraints, redundant regulations and reimbursement redesigns have grown and been amplified by the pandemic and seriously threaten the operation and facilities of programs that meet critical human service needs. New government mandates, such as minimum wage increases, are well-intentioned but when not accompanied by contract increases that affect the entire human services sector, lead to agreements that do not fully fund the cost of providing vital services.

- **Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment and Minimum Wage Increases:** The Executive Budget's inclusion of a one-time 5.4% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for human services providers, \$40.7 million in increased funding to cover minimum wage increases, and over \$200 million in retention bonuses for frontline workers is a welcome

step toward reducing the gap between contract amounts and the true cost of services. Catholic Charities supports the State's application of these funds to include the full range of human services programs and service categories, and the extension of these initiatives into future years.

### **Immigration & Legal Services:**

Catholic Charities provides services to tens of thousands of immigrants and refugees each year, from legal assistance, case management, referrals, and education, to the administration of the New Americans Hotline. Catholic Charities asks for increased public support that will allow it to bring these vital services to more communities and increase the breadth of services offered.

- **Liberty Defense Project/Pro-Bono Project:** Catholic Charities is proud to partner with the New York State Liberty Defense Project to increase statewide access to legal assistance through direct legal services programming and its Pro Bono Program. Catholic Charities urges the legislature to preserve and enhance the Executive Budget's inclusion of \$12.0 million to ensure all immigrant New Yorkers' access to free, quality legal counsel.
- **Legal and Social Services:** The Executive Budget's increased funding for the Office for New American will help increase access and bring vital legal, social and educational services to NY's immigrants, asylum seekers, Unaccompanied Minors (UAM), day laborers and refugees throughout NYS. Continued outreach, pandemic education, and provision of services in these communities has helped to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and provided relief for those ineligible for federal assistance.

### **Affordable Housing & Homelessness:**

The critical shortage of affordable housing and the disparity between incomes and rents forces more New York families to pay a very high proportion of their income for housing. Many previously affordable apartments have moved toward market level rents, and those with low incomes and special needs are particularly impacted by rising costs. State and local governments have important roles in addressing this crisis.

- **Affordable, Supportive, and Homeless Housing:** Catholic Charities is encouraged by the Executive Budget's inclusion of a \$4.5 billion, five-year housing plan that will support the development and preservation of 100,000 units of affordable housing and 10,000 units of supportive housing, and welcomes the State's continued support of the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) and Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP). As these funds are allocated, flexibility in the percentage of units dedicated to specific populations would help ensure a solid diversity of individuals and families in these new and preserved units.
- **Rental Assistance & Eviction Prevention:** Catholic Charities supports increased assistance and resources for rental assistance programs that help the unemployed, and for state and local support of similar programs that grant access to market rate housing and assist those, including immigrants, who are ineligible for federal assistance. The Executive Budget's increased allocation for the Legal Representation for Eviction Cases Program will help to provide much-needed aid for tenants struggling to remain in their homes. The establishment

of a state refundable tax credit for individuals and families with under 80% Area Median income (AMI) for rent paid in excess of 30% of their Monthly Adjusted Income would provide further relief.

**Supplemental Food Programs:**

Catholic Charities supports families facing food shortages, or food insecurity, through a network of food pantries and soup kitchens. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have hosted hundreds of ‘pop-up pantry’ distributions – each supporting between 300 and 500 families. Through State funding, we continue to screen seniors and families for SNAP eligibility.

- **Nourish New York:** The Nourish New York program has helped provide families and individuals visiting Catholic Charities food pantries with much-needed fresh products at throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Continued funding for this program will enable those in need access the healthy ingredients necessary to combat food insecurity and promote positive health outcomes.

On behalf of New York’s most vulnerable and Catholic Charities Community Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you for continuing to serve this great State of New York. Please do not hesitate to contact me for additional detail.