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NYCHA Community Spaces

NYCHA Community Spaces – In addition to the 400,000 New Yorkers that live in housing developments managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), NYCHA also manages sites that are home to more than 250 non-profit run community centers, child care centers, and senior centers. Unfortunately, after years of Federal and State divestment, NYCHA has an immense capital improvement backlog, and as their building portfolio has deteriorated, the nonprofits that run programs out of these community spaces have faced increasing challenges partnering with NYCHA in order to maintain their centers.

These community spaces are at risk. NYCHA's 2017 Physical Needs Assessment (PNA) projected \$31.8 billion in capital repair needs across their portfolio over the next five years to keep the authority's decades-old buildings in good condition. Unfortunately, NYCHA does not have the necessary funds to make these repairs. As a result NYCHA has been forced to prioritize the most immediate needs, namely toxic lead and mold in residential apartments, leaving them unable to deal with larger infrastructural challenges and the needs of nonprofit-run community spaces. As such, the recently released *NYCHA 2.0* plan does not include any funding for repairs to community spaces that are embedded in their developments across the City, despite the PNA estimating \$500 million needed for vital repairs in those spaces.

In addition, as NYCHA has faced increasing financial challenges, they have been less responsive to everyday maintenance needs, forcing the nonprofits that run these centers to divert scarce resources to maintenance work or risk facing an onslaught of fines from the City's regulatory agencies that regularly inspect these spaces. Everything from plumbing, fire extinguisher maintenance, repairs to kitchen equipment, and electrical work has become the de facto responsibility of the nonprofit human services contractor, all without any corresponding adjustment to City contracts that would allow them to be reimbursed for these new costs.

Community Space Coalition Platform – UNH represents 24 settlement houses that operate nearly 200 programs out of 125 different NYCHA-based sites, serving approximately 250,000 individuals who live in and around NYCHA housing. These centers are a critical lifeline for NYCHA residents and provide vital services that keep these communities affordable, allow older people to age in place, improve quality of life, and provide residents with services that connect them to jobs, healthcare, and community.

UNH, in partnership with the Day Care Council of New York and LiveOn NY, has developed a three-pronged platform that includes capital funding from New York State for the emergency repair needs of these centers, reimbursements from New York City for the maintenance of these sites, and reforms to NYCHA that will allow both of these funding streams to be deployed quickly and effectively. Taken together, these common-sense policies would vastly improve conditions for the City's nonprofit contractors and ensure the continued integration of vital services within NYCHA communities.

Capital Funding from the State – NYCHA's 2017 PNA identified \$500 million in vital repairs for community spaces in NYCHA over the coming five years. Despite the State's recent investment in New York's nonprofit community through infrastructure funds including the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program, NYCHA-based nonprofits were excluded, unable to access this or other State funding streams to address the infrastructural challenges they face in these community spaces. UNH is recommending that **New York State create a capital fund that is dedicated to nonprofits operating out of NYCHA-based sites.** These funds,

applied for by the nonprofits based on their capital needs at individual sites, would fund necessary repairs that allow programs and services to continue operating uninterrupted.

Reimbursement for Maintenance from the City – It is critical that the City Agencies that contract nonprofits to provide services out of NYCHA-based community spaces acknowledge the ongoing facility maintenance that they have taken on to keep their programs running. In an environment where hundreds of children, young adults, or older adults rely on early childhood education programs, after school, senior meals and recreation services, NYCHA’s 30 day average turnaround time for repair requests is insufficient. While waiting for NYCHA to make repairs, some centers have been forced to close and others have had their operating licenses revoked, interrupting services for the entire community. As a result, the nonprofits that manage NYCHA-based community centers have been forced to hire custodial staff and bring in expensive contractors to bypass NYCHA’s bureaucracy to get the work done. There appears to be no end in sight for this arrangement, and it’s time that the **City agencies that have contracted these nonprofits compensate them for necessary maintenance and repairs at these sites that keep the doors open and programs running.** Nonprofits spend tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars of their own funding annually just to cover this gap. Contracts with city agencies including the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), Administration for Children Services (ACS), Department of Education (DOE), and the Department for the Aging (DFTA) for community, child care, and senior centers respectively should be adjusted to include funding for these costs.

Reforms at NYCHA– UNH has developed a set of process-oriented reforms, each having the potential to improve the day-to-day business and viability of providers operating within NYCHA without adding additional stress to NYCHA’s current financial situation:

- **Re-direct Fines** – Nonprofit human service providers, who lack site control and rely on NYCHA to make repairs, should not be subject to citations and fines from DOHMH or FDNY for violations that NYCHA is responsible for remediating. When such violations are found during inspections, and if these violations have already been reported to NYCHA by the provider, the provider should not be penalized;
- **Increase Transparency** – Providers must be given easy access to an up-to-date list of vendors that have been pre-approved by NYCHA in order to expedite procurement processes. The current system requires providers to submit requests to NYCHA for each approval—a process that often takes many months—every time they engage a contractor, even when they have long histories of working with a particular contractor that has been previously approved by NYCHA;
- **Improve Inter-Agency Cooperation** – NYCHA and the agencies that utilize their program space, including ACS, DFTA, DOE, and DYCD need a clear division of responsibilities for the maintenance and upkeep of NYCHA sites. In order to provide stability to providers, once established and agreed upon, this division should be standardized as appropriate across all agencies that fund providers operating out of NYCHA properties; and
- **Design an Approval Process for Repairs** – NYCHA should work internally and with nonprofit providers to accelerate approval for repairs and renovations that are necessary to operate programs and services, especially in instances where the provider has independently procured funding for said repairs and renovations. In addition, NYCHA should expedite processes with the residential repair division when floods, leaks, or other issues originate in apartments and require a two-pronged repair to fully address as existing conditions in the apartments above are creating damage to the community space below.

UNH is New York’s association of settlement houses. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement begun over a century ago, UNH advocates for good public policies that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. Our membership includes 40 New York City-based settlement houses and two upstate affiliate members who collectively reach more than 765,000 people across the state.

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