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**Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Public Housing
Honorable Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Chair
Subcommittee on Capital Budget
Honorable Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair**

**Delivered at the Joint Hearing on NYCHA's 2017 Physical Needs Assessment
Presented by J.T. Falcone, Policy Analyst
November 15, 2018**

Good morning Chair Ampry-Samuel and Chair Gibson, and members of the Committee on Public Housing and Subcommittee on Capital Budget. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is J.T. Falcone, and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH). 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 settlement houses and two upstate affiliate members who collectively reach more than 765,000 people.

23 of our members operate out of sites owned by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), where they offer a wide range of services and run over 125 different programs including Cornerstones, early childhood education, and senior centers. These centers have not been immune to the infrastructural challenges that plague the Authority's aging facilities' portfolio. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal noted that an estimated \$500 million is needed for vital repairs in more than 250 community centers, child care centers, and senior centers that are operated by community-based organizations in NYCHA sites.¹

UNH is here today with our colleagues from the Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) and LiveOn NY to recommend reforms—including re-directing fines, improved inter-agency cooperation and a streamlined process for repair approval— that would provide relief to the community-based organizations operating these centers without adding stress to NYCHA's financial situation.

Collectively, UNH, DCCNY, and LiveOn NY represent a majority of the nonprofit human service providers operating the 250 community centers, child care centers, and senior centers that require vital repairs. These nonprofits operate programs under contract with the City's human service agencies, including

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-housing-authority-needs-500-million-to-repair-community-centers-1538091604>

Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), Department for the Aging (DFTA), Department of Education (DOE), and Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Our members provide the essential services that New Yorkers rely on every day. Community centers give youth and young adults a place to go after school; child care centers allow caretakers to get to work; and senior centers help break down social isolation, among numerous benefits.

Unfortunately, as NYCHA’s backlog of capital repairs has escalated, many centers have fallen into disrepair, requiring critical fixes to ensure that they remain safe, and inhibiting the ability of community-based organizations to operate normally. With violations piling up, providers have faced an onslaught of fines from the City’s regulatory agencies, including Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Fire Department of New York (FDNY).

With NYCHA unable to respond to repair requests in a timely manner, the contracted nonprofits running community centers, childcare centers, and senior centers are put in a difficult position. Their contracts often do not allow them to spend program dollars on repairs, and even when they procure the necessary funding to make needed repairs—either from the contracting agency or private philanthropic sources—NYCHA’s approval protocol can prevent them from moving forward with projects for weeks, months, or in some cases, years. Requests wind through NYCHA’s approval process while capital dollars sit unused and conditions worsen. To make matters worse, there is a lack of internal coordination in NYCHA between the residential repair department and those who are responsible for repairs at child care centers, community centers, and senior centers. When a leak originates from a residential apartment, our members spend thousands of dollars—often their own, privately-raised funds—replacing ceilings, floors, and walls only to have the same area flood again because the leak in the toilet or shower upstairs was never actually repaired.

We acknowledge the difficult financial position NYCHA faces after years of government divestment. We have assembled the following recommendations that would drastically improve the situation faced by providers of community-based services without adding 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 due to NYCHA’s failure to make those repairs. When violations are found during inspections—if these violations have already been reported to NYCHA by the provider—the provider should not be penalized, a citation should be directed to NYCHA instead;
- **Mandate Inter-agency Cooperation** – NYCHA and the agencies that leverage their space, including ACS, DFTA, DYCD, and DOE, need a clear division of responsibilities for the maintenance and upkeep of NYCHA sites. In order to provide stability to providers, this division of responsibility, once established and agreed upon, should be standardized as appropriate across all agencies that fund providers operating out of NYCHA properties; and
- **Design an Approval Process for Repairs** – NYCHA must work internally and with providers to accelerate approval for repairs and renovations and must 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.

UNH looks forward to working with the City Council and NYCHA to implement these recommendations as well as explore additional avenues for reform that strengthen the delivery of City-contracted human services within NYCHA developments, including to NYCHA residents themselves.

I would be happy to answer any questions at this time and can also be reached at jfalcone@unhny.org for more information.