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UNH Executive Director Susan Stamler Responds to Mayor’s Proposed Budget

Expansion of 3K admirable, but cutting services for students, immigrants, and seniors sends the City in the wrong direction

As Mayor de Blasio remarked in his announcement of the $88.6 billion preliminary budget, New York City represents opportunity and diversity. While we are encouraged by the expansion of the 3-K for All program, it was startling to hear the Mayor talk about the advantages of living in a fair city that benefits from a diverse population while cutting funding for those very same people.

During the budget announcement, the Mayor showed that the population of immigrants in New York City is at its highest level in more than a century, and demonstrated that immigrants “underpin our economic success.” It is therefore astonishing that the proposed budget fails to restore $12m in funding from adult literacy programs. These classes are vital to the long-term economic and social stability of immigrants in our City, many of whom are directed to learn English but will no longer have the possibility to do so. This funding must be restored for New York City to be a place of opportunity for all.

We appreciate the Mayor’s expansion of 3K and the recognition that early education should be a right for all. As the Mayor said, is important for New York to give “more kids the start only some can afford.” But while early education is the start of a child’s learning, the path to success must include summer camp and after-school programs, and the preliminary budget eliminates the chance for 34,000 middle school students to attend summer camp. Research shows children who don’t have access to summer programs experience educational and nutritional setbacks which widen the achievement gap. This isn’t the way to provide a fair start for all New York City’s children, and this funding must be restored in the enacted budget.

Mayor de Blasio showed in his budget announcement that New York City’s population is on the rise and is now at more than 8.5 million people. 31% of those people are over the age of 50. We look forward to working to ensure $8.72m is restored in the adopted budget for older adult services. This funding is vital for our older family members and neighbors so they can age in their homes, avoid hospitals and nursing homes, and continue to live fulfilling lives.

Finally, the Mayor spoke at length about making New York City the “Fairest Big City in America.” As long as early childhood educators at community-based organizations make less money than their similarly-qualified counterparts in public schools, we cannot consider our city “fair.” Even as these teachers and staff members care for and educate our children, they are often relying upon government assistance to take care of their own families. This inequity is inexcusable, and must be addressed.

We can truly make New York City fair, create the opportunities new residents are looking for, and support all our neighbors. To do so, it is imperative the City dedicates the funding to essential services for all populations.