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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration**

**Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair, Committee on Immigration**

**Presented by Kevin Douglas, Co-Director of Policy & Advocacy  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 22, 2017**

Good afternoon Chair Menchaca and members of the Committee on Immigration. On behalf of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), thank you for convening this important oversight hearing to evaluate the Mayor's Preliminary budget as it relates to immigrant New Yorkers, who currently comprise over a third of New York City's population. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH's membership includes 38 organizations working at more than 600 sites to provide high quality services and activities to over a half million New Yorkers each year.

In light of the intense xenophobia, discriminatory federal policies, and increased incidents of hate crimes, it is imperative that New York City does not exist just as a sanctuary for immigrant New Yorkers, but also as a place of opportunity. To this end, while UNH welcomes and applauds the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and City Council in taking strong public positions in support of immigrants, we urge the City to back these pronouncements with real and sustained investments in health, education, and legal services that promote immigrant wellbeing.

Specifically, UNH urges City Council to work with the Administration to make the following investments in the FY 2018 budget:

- ✓ 12% Sustainability Investment in Nonprofit Human Service Providers
- ✓ \$12m to Restore and Baseline Adult Literacy Programs + Establish Task Force
- ✓ \$5m to launch City Council Family Literacy Pilot
- ✓ \$1m to Re-Launch NYC's Immigrant Bridge Workforce Program
- ✓ \$20.1m to Restore and Baseline IOI and NYIFUP Legal Services
- ✓ \$16.5m for Senior Centers & City Council Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations Initiative
- ✓ \$2.2m to Renew & Expand City Council Mental Health For Vulnerable Populations Initiative

✓ **12% Sustainability Investment in Nonprofit Human Service Providers**

Our first recommendation is that the City Council include in its response to the Preliminary Budget, a request for a 12% across-the-board increase on all human services contracts. As the Council is no doubt aware, the nonprofit sector in New York City is increasingly under a tremendous amount of financial pressure as government contracts fail to cover the full cost of services, expenses rise, and reimbursements remain flat. An increase in human services contracts is necessary to ensure that providers can attract and retain qualified staff, make needed infrastructure upgrades, adequately purchase equipment and supplies. With fully 18% of the sector financially insolvent, New York City must act to stabilize and strengthen nonprofit providers if they are to continue to provide high quality services to immigrants and other New Yorkers.

✓ **\$12m to Restore and Baseline Adult Literacy Programs + Establish Task Force**

New York City is home to over 3 million foreign-born residents, whom collectively comprise over 37% of the total population and 43% of the City's workforce. Immigrants are significant drivers of our economy, generating over \$257 billion in economic activity annually<sup>1</sup>. Yet many are stuck in low-wage, low-skilled jobs—where at best, they struggle to get by, and at worst, are subject to exploitative labor practices. Key barriers to economic success for immigrant New Yorkers include low educational attainment and limited English proficiency:

- Within NYC, 13% of the US- born population over the age of 19 lacks a high school diploma, but for immigrants, the rate is more than double at 27%<sup>2</sup>.
- Of the City's 1.7 million Limited English Proficient (LEP) population, fully 88% are foreign born, and of these LEPs, 40% *also* lack a high school diploma<sup>3</sup>.
- In 2014 the median NYC household income for the native born was \$60,000, as compared to \$45,700 for the foreign born—despite foreign-born individuals' higher rate of participation in the labor market (e.g. 82.4% of foreign born males vs. 71.5% of native born males)<sup>4</sup>.
- Nationally, Spanish-speaking English learners lose approximately \$3,000 per year in earnings, on average, as a direct result of inadequate English skills<sup>5</sup>.

In order to address this crisis, last year the City Council and Mayor worked to make an historic \$12 million investment in educational opportunities for immigrant New Yorkers. With this \$12m investment, over 5,700 individuals were served in adult literacy classes, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes. In addition, the City's Community Schools model was strengthened by the addition

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<sup>1</sup> DiNapoli, Thomas. Office of the New York State Comptroller: *The Role of Immigrants in the NYC Economy*; <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/rpt7-2016.pdf>. November 2015

<sup>2</sup> McHugh, Margie and Morawski, Madeline. Migration Policy Institute: *Immigrants and WIOA Services; Comparisons of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in New York City, New York*; <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/WIOAFactSheet-NewYorkCityNY-FINAL.pdf>. April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Salvo, Joseph. NYC Department of City Planning: *Drawing a Portrait of New York City's Population*; PowerPoint presentation prepared for the Micha Faith Table Immigration Committee Meeting, September 27, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz, Amber and Soifer, Don. The Lexington Institute: *The Value of English Proficiency to the United States Economy*; <http://lexingtoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/ValueOfEnglishProficiency.pdf>. December 2012.

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of an adult literacy component, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs was able to begin work on an updated *We are New York* educational series.

After years of being underfunded, this investment represented a long-overdue down-payment on building an actual system of adult literacy for the 2.2 million New Yorkers – a third of the adult population – that lack English proficiency, a high school diploma, or both. UNH applauds the Mayor's decision to address this crisis of under-skilled New Yorkers, and thanks the City Council for their leadership in pushing for this \$12m investment.

Today, English classes are needed more than ever as immigrant communities live in fear of new federal immigration policy, and struggle to understand their rights and resources available to them. In addition, conditions are unfortunately ripe for increased incidents of fraud perpetrated by notarios and others that prey on linguistically isolated immigrant communities with promises of immigration services and outcomes – for exorbitant fees – that often never materialize. If New York City truly wants to be a sanctuary for vulnerable immigrant communities it must do more than limit cooperation with federal immigration agents. It must actually invest in building pathways to opportunities for integration and economic success among the most marginalized immigrants. Without English language proficiency, most immigrants will be unable to access higher education and family-sustaining jobs and careers.

UNH urges the City Council to work with the Mayor to renew the FY2017 \$12 million investment in this budget in order to ensure thousands of immigrants are able to continue their classes and do not see them close at the end of June. This investment must be baselined so that a new RFP for services can be developed. The current reimbursement rate for adult literacy classes is so far below actual costs, that providers wrestled with the question of whether to take the funding available through last year's investment. While many providers ultimately chose to accept the funds in order to ensure their communities received vital services, many chose not to accept funding as it would induce deficits in their programs. Only with baselined funding will the Department of Youth and Community Development be able to develop a new RFP with fair reimbursement rates. In fact, part of last year's \$12 million investment went towards a project being undertaken by the Literacy Assistance Center, under contract with DYCD, to develop a comprehensive study on the essential elements of quality adult literacy programs and their true costs.

UNH further recommends that City Council work with the Administration to develop a Task Force on Adult Literacy. One of the long-standing impediments to NYC having a comprehensive strategy and system of adult literacy is the fact that services are provided by so many entities with no coordinated oversight or vision. No less than a half dozen City entities provide some form of adult literacy programs, either directly or through contracts, including DYCD, HRA, DOE, CUNY, MOIA, WKDEV and others. In addition, dozens of community based organizations, library branches, and unions also provide services with a combination of city, state, federal and philanthropic dollars. A Task Force would bring all of these stakeholders to the table, in addition to advocates, researchers and other adult literacy experts, to examine the City's adult literacy system and make recommendations to improve coordination, referral, and outcomes.

✓ **\$5m to launch City Council Family Literacy Pilot**

The Family Literacy Model expands on core components of adult literacy. Consisting of interventions for both children and their parents, Family Literacy is a holistic approach to whole-family success. UNH Preliminary Budget Testimony—City Council Committee on Immigration, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

Recognizing that children in UPK or after-school programs that go home to parents that don't speak English lose out on critical parent support and engagement, family literacy programs works on the literacy skills of children and youth, while also providing adult literacy and child development instruction for their parents. The additional essential element of the approach is shared learning time, where parents and their children practice reading and storytelling together, reinforcing each other's confidence and learning gains. The City of New York formerly funded family literacy programs through DYCD, observing in a 2009 procurement:

*"Programs have reported noteworthy improvements by both children and parents. As reported by their classroom teachers and parents, participating children are more motivated to learn, have greater self-confidence, and therefore do better academically. Parents have improved their literacy skills as well. Parents are more aware of the resources available to support their families and have increased their involvement in their children's education and schools. They go to the library and read with their children, and they participate in school activities by working as volunteers and PTA meetings."*

Despite the fact that the City's Family Literacy program was eliminated in 2010 as part of a PEG (Program to Eliminate the Gap), many settlement houses and other providers recognized the power of the model, and have attempted to maintain the spirit of family literacy programming by cobbling together a patchwork of city, state, federal and private funds. Unfortunately, the lack of dedicated and robust funding means most of these programs struggle to reach their full potential. Recently, UNH hosted a forum attended by over a dozen providers interested in learning more about the model and bringing back to their own communities, but most lack the funding to do so.

UNH recommends City Council fund a \$5 million family literacy pilot in FY2018 which would allow over 20 organizations across the City to implement family literacy programs, as well as provide opportunities for peer learning, data capture and evaluation.

✓ **\$1m to Re-Launch NYC's Immigrant Bridge Workforce Program**

NYC is home to a significant number of high-skilled immigrants, who hold advanced degrees and specialized training from abroad, but lack sufficient English skills to obtain the type of employment they are qualified to employ. In fact, in New York City, over 150,000 immigrants hold college degrees but are unemployed or underemployed, including 38,000 engineers, nearly 21,000 nurses and over 12,000 IT professionals<sup>6</sup>.

Instead of putting their full talents to use, many of these immigrants wind up in low-wage positions such as cab drivers, service industry workers and nannies. In response, a program called Immigrant Bridge was launched in 2013 with the goal of helping these skilled immigrants transition from unemployment or underemployment, to stable, middle-class jobs. Key components of the program included instruction on career development, re-credentialing, job-search processes, and US work culture; networking opportunities with professionals in targeted fields and career advisement; contextualized intermediate level English language classes, and other wrap-around human services.

Funded by the NYC Economic Development Corporation, the program was run for two years by a trio of providers, including UNH member organization CAMBA, Goodwill Industries of New York and

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<sup>6</sup> Imprint: *Supporting New York City's Hidden Resource- Skilled Immigrants*; PowerPoint presentation prepared for the New York City Employment and Training Coalition Policy Summit, June 8, 2015.

Northern New Jersey, and Upwardly Global. Of the 600 immigrants the providers engaged, 90% completed the job training and 60% were placed in jobs in growth industries such as finance, healthcare and computer engineering. Of those placed in employment, starting salaries averaged \$45,000/year and 10% achieved a starting salary of \$75,000/year or above. In total, there was over an 820% return on the City's investment as program participants generated \$8.2 million annually in new income as a result of the training and support they received.

Not only was the program successful in helping skilled immigrants obtain better employment and improve their earnings, but as those individuals transitioned out of their lower-skilled jobs they created openings for other New Yorkers in search of entry-level employment. Despite its success, this program has not been funded since 2014. UNH recommends Council work with the Administration to restore this program at \$1 million.

✓ **\$25.3m to Restore and Baseline IOI and NYIFUP Legal Services**

Over the last year this nation has experienced an explosion of xenophobic rhetoric and hate attacks, as well as changes in federal policy that specifically target Muslims, Mexicans and undocumented individuals of all backgrounds. Between the President's use of discriminatory and un-American Executive Orders and promises to ramp up detentions and deportations, many of New York's immigrants are fearful and in need of legal representation. Due to this intense fear, which is felt most by those who are undocumented, there is a heightened risk of these individuals being taken advantage of by unscrupulous scammers.

While NYC's Mayor and City Council have affirmed their intent for New York City to remain a "sanctuary city," it is imperative that free, safe and accessible legal services are made available through trusted community based organizations and other legal providers. Further, it is essential that funding for these services be expanded and baselined to meet increased demand and provide stability and continuity in their services.

UNH strongly endorses the recommendations of the New York Immigration Coalition to expand and baseline Immigration Opportunities (IOI) legal services from \$8.6m to \$13.3m, as well as renewing, expanding and baselining the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) from \$6.2m to \$12 million in order to ensure individuals facing deportation receive legal representation.

✓ **\$16.5m for Senior Centers & Council Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations Initiative**

As New York's immigrant population continues to age --nearly half of all New Yorkers over the age of 60 (463,000) are foreign born-- it is essential that the City invest in the senior centers to support their health, well-being and community engagement. A 2013 study by Center for an Urban Future examined the implications of an aging immigrant population and found that immigrant seniors have lower incomes, less retirement savings, and can access fewer entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare. Nearly two-thirds of senior immigrants have limited English proficiency and 37 percent live in linguistically isolated households, putting them at greater risk for depression, loneliness, and isolation.

Currently NYC's senior centers report serving speakers of 26 different languages, and in fact many senior centers were created specifically to support immigrant communities and continue to support this population. UNH appreciates the support the City Council has lent to these centers through its Senior Centers for Immigrant Populations Initiative and recommends that the initiative be renewed in FY2018 at \$1.5m.

Even for those centers not specifically targeted at immigrant communities, 40% of all adults attending senior centers are in fact immigrants, meaning support for the City's overall senior services system is essential to the well-being of older immigrant adults. By providing culturally competent and sensitive spaces for all, NYC's senior centers have become safe havens for older adults, able to connect them to additional social services they may require. In order to ensure all senior centers have the resources they need to provide support to immigrant seniors, UNH urges the City Council to work with the administration to add \$15m to the Department for the Aging's senior centers in order to bolster centers currently being under-reimbursed for their services.

✓ **\$2.2m to Renew & Expand City Council Mental Health For Vulnerable Populations Initiative**

UNH urges the City Council to consider the behavioral health needs of immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, in light of recent policy changes from the federal government around immigration. Executive orders around refugees and travel, increasing threats of mass deportation, questions around the future of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, acts of intimidation and violence, and ICE raids across the country, have caused immigrant families to feel targeted and unsafe in their neighborhoods. UNH's member organizations, including the Arab American Family Support Center and Chinese American Planning Council, are reporting increased levels of anxiety from families with mixed immigration statuses, as well as concerns around lapses in sobriety. These concerns often become apparent during legal clinics or Know Your Rights Trainings.

In FY2017, the City Council Mental Health for Vulnerable Populations Initiative was funded at \$1,093,000, with each provider receiving an average of approximately \$91,000. Increasing this initiative by \$1 million could help to expand the City's reach to behavioral health services to immigrants, and could support approximately 10 new organizations. Targeting these funds to organizations with trusted reputations and links to immigrant communities would be of utmost importance.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. United Neighborhood Houses is committed to working with City Council and the Administration to secure a budget that supports the health and safety of immigrant New Yorkers while also creating pathways to opportunity. We are happy to take questions now or by contacting Kevin Douglas, Co-Director of Policy & Advocacy, at 917.484.9321 or [kdouglas@unhny.org](mailto:kdouglas@unhny.org).