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**New York City Council FY2019 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
New York City Council Committee on Immigration  
Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair**

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Presented by Kevin Douglas, Co-Director of Policy & Advocacy  
March 26, 2018**

Good afternoon Chair Menchaca and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH). UNH is the membership association comprised of the City's 39 settlement houses and community centers which provide services at more than 650 sites to over 750,000 New Yorkers each year. For over 100 years, these services have ranged from early childhood education and after-school programs, to youth employment and adult education classes, to older adult, behavioral health, and housing programs. Immigrants make up a significant percentage of the individuals our members serve annually in their programs with specialized immigrant services including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, legal services, and citizenship, newcomer, and refugee assistance.

On behalf of our members, United Neighborhood Houses urges the Council to work with the Administration to ensure adult and family literacy programs, as well as across-the-board human services contract improvements, are prioritized in the City's FY2019 Executive Budget.

**Adult Literacy**

With the support and leadership of the City Council, the City has invested \$12m in new adult literacy programs in both FY2018 and FY2017. While this one year funding represents important progress after significant cuts in FY2016, adult literacy providers are currently struggling to make the best use of this investment because of severely underfunded reimbursement rates, as well as significant delays in the contracting process. A 2017 DYCD-commissioned analysis of the true costs of providing quality adult literacy programming, found that on average, adult literacy programs cost about \$3,600 to provide instruction and support to each student they serve<sup>1</sup>; instead, the current reimbursement rate hovers between \$850- \$1,000 per student. This means that many adult literacy providers are actually taking a loss on contracts when they provide literacy services to their community and having to raise private dollars or supplement out of scarce general operating dollars.

In order to rectify this imbalance in contract reimbursement rates, UNH recommends the City baseline this \$12m investment in the FY2019 Executive Budget and develop a new procurement that more closely tracks to the true cost of quality programming. Unfortunately, FY2018's joint Administration-Council investment (\$6m each) was zeroed out in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, meaning thousands of immigrants and other adult learners across the City will lose access to their adult literacy programs at the end of this fiscal year.

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy Assistance Center, 2018. *Investing in Quality, A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders*: <http://www.lacnyc.org/investing-in-quality.html>.

UNH also supports and recommends the creation of an Adult Literacy Taskforce with the goal of developing a comprehensive City vision for adult literacy services across all relevant agencies (DYCD, HRA, DOE, CUNY, etc.). Much as the City has plans for growing programs to support its young children (UPK, 3K) and its older adults (Age-friendly NYC), it should have a comprehensive vision for the City's 3.5 million immigrants and other adults lacking English proficiency and/or a High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma. Such a taskforce would also be responsible for designing the City's response to changing federal policies that will make it harder to serve undocumented adult learners, as well as establishing a unified and user-friendly referral system for New Yorkers seeking adult literacy services.

### **Family Literacy**

Additionally, the City can ensure the educational success of the entire family by funding a new City Family Literacy Program. Grounded in evidence-based, holistic models that engage both children and caregivers in a collaborative and mutually reinforcing learning process, families leave better equipped to gain the skills they need to succeed. Although Family Literacy models vary, they represent a two-generation approach to programming which focuses equally and intentionally on services and opportunities for both a parent and their child to maximize the overall success of the family. According to the National Center for Families Learning, typical aspects of Family Literacy include: 1) Interactive literacy activities between parents and children, 2) Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children, 3) Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and 4) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life.

When New York City last funded family literacy programs (before they were eliminated in a PEG), DYCD stated that:

*“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.”*

Additional research into the benefits of two-generation and family literacy programs has indicated that:

- When parents are dedicated to their own education, they serve as positive role models for their children’s academic success.
- More sophisticated language skills in children have been linked to parent’s literacy skills and shared reading.
- Skills that parents learn through their own education can be applied to their children, leading to better educational outcomes.
- Family literacy programs increase job skills and employment opportunities for parents by incorporating vocational skills training into their programs.

To foster the development of existing and new family literacy programs, UNH urges a \$5m investment in a Family Literacy Program in FY2019. These funds could target community based organizations with a successful track record of providing at least one of the four core elements of family literacy. Such an investment would support learning opportunities for 450 families at 16 programs, plus an

additional 8 capacity building grants to support organizations in conducting community needs assessments, program planning, development of partnerships, and staff training.

### **Human Services Sector General Support**

In addition to our requests on behalf of immigrant New Yorkers and the settlement houses that serve them, it is essential that the City recognize and address the larger-scale underfunding of city contracts across the nonprofit human services sector as a whole, which is calling into question the solvency of nonprofits and their ability to provide services in their communities.

In support of this sector and the nonprofit workforce serving their communities, we strongly encourage that the City establish contracting principles that 1) bring all human services contracts up to a 15% indirect rate, and 2) bring fringe rates up to 37% (including 15% for health insurance). In addition, immediate investments are needed to 1) provide a 10% increase on occupancy costs (a critical omission in the “model senior center” budget), and 2) provide a 10% increase on casualty and liability insurance budget lines. The sector estimates these contract fixes will cost upwards of \$200 million, and calls on the Administration to conduct the necessary analysis, and take the appropriate steps to implement these recommendations in FY2019.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for the Council’s leadership on these critical issues.