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## **UNH State Fiscal Year 2017-18 Budget & Policy Priorities** **Immigrant Opportunity**

### **Adult Literacy Education (ALE) – Fund at \$17.2 million (\$10.9 million increase)**

#### **Funding History:**

*Executive FY 2017-2018: \$6.3m*

Enacted FY 2016-17: \$7.3m

Enacted FY 2015-16: \$6.3m

**Services Funded:** ALE funding supports English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes.

**Challenge and Opportunity:** NYC is home to 2.2 million adults who lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma, or both; nearly 15,000 currently sit on waitlists to access adult literacy classes. State investment in adult literacy can help these New Yorkers better compete in the job market, support their children in school, experience better health outcomes, and more fully engage in the civic and social lives of their communities.

Support for ALE is more critical than ever as the New York State Education Department has estimated that recent changes to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) will cost New York State roughly \$9m annually with the elimination of the *English Language Civics* portion of WIOA. In addition, new federal WIOA standards will make it exceedingly difficult for New York to serve its undocumented population in ESOL classes.

UNH recommendation: \$17.2 million to serve nearly 10,000 additional immigrants and other adult learners.

**Immigrant Legal Services** – Fund various initiatives that will expand representation for, and protection of, immigrant communities across NYS:

- Increase Office of New Americans (ONA) funding from \$6.4m to \$15m to create Immigrant Legal Defense Fund
- Launch \$15m pilot to expand access to justice in underserved areas across the state
- Increase NY Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) funding from \$650k to \$4.5m

**Funding History:** First created in 2012 as a line item in the budget, the New York State Office for New Americans became an official Executive Agency in 2013. Most recently, it was funded at \$6.4m in FY2016, and though the Governor pledged to create an Immigrant Legal Defense Fund this year, there is no designated funding for it in the budget. Existing resources for affordable legal services are scarce, with suburban and rural areas suffering the most from this gap between need and aid. In New York, an estimated one third of all undocumented immigrants qualify for immigration relief. However, there is currently only one non-profit lawyer/ BIA representative for every 2,700 undocumented immigrants.

**Services Funded:** These legal services initiatives would support a range of immigrants and refugees, including support in applying for naturalization, defense against deportation, and assistance in status adjustment cases.

**Challenge and Opportunity:** With the President's recent Executive Orders regarding immigration policy, refugees, and deportation, there is great anxiety in New York's immigrant community, and a corresponding need for legal

services. Investing in legitimate legal resources will help eligible legal immigrants naturalize and achieve citizenship, and will help improve outcomes for all immigrants who may qualify for immigration relief. In addition, these legal services will protect all immigrants who are vulnerable to fraudulent schemes, as non-authorized providers often seek to fill that gap in the market.

UNH recommendation: Fund ONA at \$15 million, Underserved Pilot at \$15 million, NYIFUP at \$4.5 million.

### **The NYS Dream Act – Fund at \$27 million (new investment)**

**Enacted FY 2016-17 Budget:** Not included, though included in FY 2016-17 Executive Budget.

**Services Funded:** The New York State DREAM Act would grant access to the State’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to youth lacking a documented immigration status.

**Challenge and Opportunity:** An estimated 51,000 young adults across the state are ineligible to receive TAP assistance, putting their dreams of a higher education out of reach, simply due to their immigration status. Many youth graduating from high school learn for the first time that they are “undocumented,” brought into the country as young children without legal documentation. Due to this status they are unfairly barred from accessing TAP, despite the tax contributions undocumented families make to the state’s economy (over \$660 million in 2010 alone, according to the Immigration Policy Center). Without this financial assistance, many find college out of reach, and as a result, enter the job market with limited career-sustaining skills.

For an estimated \$27 million annual investment, the State can ensure these youth are able to enroll in college and earn degrees that they can leverage into meaningful career opportunities, bringing the State’s investment in their K-12 education full circle.

UNH recommendation: Include and fully fund the DREAM Act at \$27 million.

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