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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council
Committee on Youth,
Honorable Debi Rose, Chair**

At the FY 2020 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Presented by Gregory Brender, Director of Children and Youth Services

March 11, 2019

Good Afternoon. Thank you, Chair Rose and members of the Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses.

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 42 neighborhood settlement houses that reaches 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

Now in our 100th year, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.

UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

UNH and its Settlement House members have a deep commitment to fostering the development of New York City's youth. As part of this work, settlement houses are major providers of after-school programs offering:

- COMPASS elementary school after-school and summer programs serving more than 12,400 students in both public schools and community-based sites;
- SONYC middle school after-school and summer programs for more than 8,700 students at both public school sites and in community spaces;

- Beacon Community Centers in public schools and Cornerstone Community Centers in NYCHA developments in which more than 22,000 youth and adults participate in programs;
- State Funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Empire State After-School programs and Advantage After-School programs which serve nearly 5,000 youth.

Settlement Houses also play a large role in providing young people with work experiences. This includes:

- Serving as the SYEP contractor who trained young people, recruited worksites, and monitored and inspected SYEP placements for more than 14,000 youth in the summer of 2018;
- Serving as the SYEP worksite for many young people whose summer jobs are in settlement house summer camps, senior centers, early childhood programs or central offices;
- Coordinating Work, Learn & Grow programs- the school year component to SYEP more than 1,100 youth;
- Developing internships for high school students completing their degrees in Transfer Schools and Young Adult Borough Centers through the Learning to Work Program; and
- Offering programs that reconnect Out of School Out of Work Youth to both education and the workforce including programs such as Intern and Earn, Learn and Earn and Youth Build.

UNH is part of the steering committee of *Campaign for Children*- a coalition of more than 150 organizations working towards high-quality early childhood education and after-school programs for every child in New York City. Along with *Campaign for Children* we work with the Youth Committee members and other City Councilmembers to bring the voices of youth to City Hall.

UNH also leads the *Campaign for Summer Jobs* advocating for City and State investment in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). In this role, UNH continues to work closely with SYEP providers to identify and resolve issues with the new procurement for SYEP contractors.

COMPASS and SONYC Rates

COMPASS and SONYC are indispensable programs for New York City's children and youth. They provide young people with the recreational activities, homework help and the social-emotional learning that a classroom experience alone cannot provide. These programs are also a lifeline for working parents who rely on these programs for care and support.

On May 10, 2018 DYCD released two Requests for Proposals for COMPASS and SONYC after-school programs.

- **EPIN: 26018I0007** - The latest SONYC RFP to re-procure 81 existing SONYC After-School and Summer Programs for middle school students which in this testimony we will call the SONYC RFP;
- **EPIN: 26018I0006** - The latest COMPASS RFP to re-procure 271 existing COMPASS After-School and Summer Programs for elementary school students which in this testimony we will call the SONYC RFP.

These requests for proposals (RFPs) were initially due July 10th and then extended until October 2nd after UNH, other advocates and providers raised concerns about the funding levels. We analyzed provider financials to show how the rates as proposed in the RFPs would not cover the costs of the Cost of Living Adjustments and the indirect rate contract adjustments that the City had been in the process of implementing as part of its non-profit resiliency work.

We commend the Administration for recognizing this unintended consequence and on September 24, 2018, the administration cancelled both the COMPASS and SONYC RFPs and announced plans to extend contracts for the providers serving the 352 public schools that were included in the RFP. Moreover, the City promised an engagement process that would include both current and prospective providers to “gain a deeper understanding of the costs associated with program delivery and draw out best practices across the sector for managing to the City’s standard per participant funding structure.”

Moving Forward

UNH has begun working with after-school providers of different sizes and program models to develop sample budgets for both COMPASS and SONYC programs that can show the true costs of providing high-quality after-school programs.

Furthermore, UNH has identified several issues that must be addressed for this process to succeed:

- **Disparate Funding Levels:** COMPASS After-School programs for elementary school students that were previously funded by the City Council and baselined or are currently funded by the City Council are funded at a base rate of only \$2,800 per child which is \$400 lower than the \$3,200 base rate for COMPASS programs.
- **Full Implementation of Indirect Rates and Cost of Living Adjustments:** A survey of 206 COMPASS and SONYC programs conducted by United Neighborhood Houses found that 51.9% of programs has not received funding for at least one round of COLAs or to adjust the indirect rate. These costs must be fully addressed.
- **The Increase in the Minimum Wage:** COMPASS and SONYC budgets must reflect the increased costs of paying staff at the minimum wage and allow for increases for staff who have gained seniority so that they earn above minimum wage.
- **Funding to cover the cost of an increased salary threshold for overtime exemptions.** On December 31, 2018, the threshold salary for classifying an employee as exempt from overtime regulations for an organization with more than 11 employees in New York rose to \$1,125 per week (\$58,500 annually). Almost all COMPASS and SONYC directors work longer than a 35-hour workweek particularly in the summer when New York City Health Department requirements mandate coverage for as much as 10 hours per day. COMPASS and SONYC budgets typically do not allow for providers to pay directors salaries at this level. Budgets must include funding to

ensure that providers can comply with both the strict standards of the Health Code and labor law.

In order to develop adequate rates for COMPASS and SONYC programs, UNH urges DYCD and the administration to:

- Work collaboratively with providers to address the issues detailed in this testimony;
- Ask providers about the true costs of services;
- Create a concept paper with a model budget which gives providers, advocates and other stakeholders an opportunity to respond before another RFP is released.

SONYC- Summer Programs for Middle School Students

Background

Summer programs provide the recreational activities and educational reinforcement that keep young people engaged and learning throughout the year.

And summer programs are a key support for families. In fact, in a survey conducted by *Campaign for Children* of 2,500 parents with children in summer programs, nearly 90% of parents reported they rely on summer camp so they can work or go to school, and that their children learn crucial academic skills while in summer camp. Nearly two-thirds of parents also reported that they relied on the free meals at summer camp to ensure their youth receive nutritious meals.

One of Mayor de Blasio's important investments upon taking office was the expansion of middle school after school programs now known as SONYC. The SONYC initiative expanded access to after-school programs for middle school students to that every student who wanted a place in an after-school program could get one. SONYC is operated entirely through community-based organizations which provide these programs in schools, public housing developments and other community spaces.

And SONYC is a success. Mayor de Blasio said "...{k}ids are learning and – and they like it. We're growing tomorrow's leaders, keeping kids safe and busy while parents are at work, building their confidence and closing in on the achievement gap.'"

After school programs typically include summer activities as part of their model both because parents need care for their children when schools are closed and because keeping kids active and engaged is the most effective strategy for combating summer learning loss. The inclusion of a summer component is a key part of SONYC's success up until this point.

Unfortunately, in his FY 2020 Preliminary Budget, the Mayor has, for the fifth time, eliminated funding for summer programs serving more than 34,000 middle school students. This cut will affect middle school students and their families in all five boroughs and across fifty City Council Districts. We deeply

appreciate the strong support that SONYC summer programs has received from this committee and from the City Council at large.

However, the Mayor must restore SONYC summer funding in the Executive Budget because the City Council can only put funds into programs in the Adopted Budget, forcing providers to organize and launch programs with as little as a few weeks' notice - and many are unable to do so. Before starting a summer program for youth, providers need to:

- Secure space and make sure it complies with all relevant standards including all of the requirements that are part of the School Aged Child Care (SACC) regulations that do not apply to the public school sites where many summer programs take place;
- Recruit, train and clear staff, including background checks to ensure that nothing in a job applicant's history would prevent them from holding a position where they interact with minors;
- Enroll program participants; and
- Plan activities such as group projects and trips.

Moving Forward

The FY 2020 Executive Budget presents an opportunity to get this right. By funding SONYC summer programs in his FY 2020 Executive Budget, Mayor de Blasio can ensure that:

- Parents know months before summer begins that they have a safe, positive developmentally appropriate place for their children to be during the school day;
- Providers can develop a plan for the summer ensuring that programs link their curriculum to what is happening in school and quality events and trips are planned;
- Schools and providers can begin to collaborate on ensuring appropriate space is available and maintained; and
- Programs have time to register youth and hire staff.

We urge the administration to ensure that these crucial programs are fully funded in the FY 2020 Executive Budget.

COMPASS After-School Programs for Elementary School Students

Background

After-school programs are especially important during the elementary school years. Elementary school children cannot be left unsupervised and many parents are concerned for their children's safety and their social-emotional growth if they return to an empty apartment without adult supervision when school lets out. There are incredible benefits to positive engagement in after-school programs. As schools required to push academic achievement earlier, after-school programs are often the only space left for many meaningful activities that promote social-emotional learning that is so important for children as they grow.

With the launch of SONYC, the City made a commitment that after-school programs would be available to every middle school student who wanted one. Working with a large network of community-based providers, the City defied skeptics and achieved this important goal in under two years.

For elementary school students however, there is a significant service gaps in neighborhoods throughout the City. Providers often have lines of parents waiting to register their children for programs and many carry significant waiting lists. Moreover, many principals have reached out to their local settlement house in the hopes of getting an after-school program in their school or the capacity to serve more children in the programs that already exist.

We have also heard from many members of the City Council that they are frustrated that elementary schools in their districts either have no free or affordable after-school options or that those that do exist serve only a fraction of the families who need these services.

Moving Forward

We believe that the City must now act to ensure that children as young as five years-old do not become latchkey kids.

UNH urges the City to expand after-school programs for elementary school students so that every family who needs a program can find one.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Background

UNH has been a longstanding proponent of the Summer Youth Employment Program and has for 18 years led the Campaign for Summer Jobs which worked with both the State and the City to significantly increase the number of youth served and the quality of work experience of SYEP participants. Through SYEP, young people have the opportunity to earn paycheck and participate in what is often their first job. Through SYEP, they gain skills and experience, and many find longer term work through their participation in SYEP.

New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program is now at a crossroads. On February 27th, DYCD released awards from a new RFP of SYEP contracts which makes dramatic changes to the program.

The SYEP RFP

The SYEP RFP is incredibly ambitious and required providers to assume significant new responsibilities. Achieving its ambitious goals will require significant new investments in the rates paid to providers

and support from the City. We are concerned that even at this late stage, with awards having been made and programs starting this July the City has not gone far enough to ensure that providers have the resources to achieve the goals laid out in the RFP.

The RFP bid contracts for SYEP into several competitions

- SYEP School Based Model (Programs that work intensively with a single school to match students with internships that relate to school curriculum or student interest)
- Younger Youth SYEP (SYEP for 14-15 year olds)
- Older Youth SYEP (SYEP for 16-24 year olds with the preponderance of jobs for 16-18 year-olds)
- Ladders for Leaders (Internships for High-Performing Youth)
- Year-Round Sector Focus Programs (SYEP linked to work during the school year such as through Work, Learn and Grow)
- SYEP for vulnerable youth (SYEP that served high-needs populations including youth in foster care)
- SYEP for Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (Universal access to SYEP for youth living in one of 15 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments that are part of the Mayor's Action Plan)
- SYEP for NYCHA (Universal Access to SYEP for youth living in select public housing developments that are not part of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety)
- SYEP for Cure Violence (SYEP linked to a Cure Violence program)

UNH is particularly concerned about the viability of the RFP's Younger Youth Model. This model moves away from traditional SYEP towards a stipended, group project led by the SYEP provider. Operating this model will require significant planning and staffing as the youth will be placed at the provider organization and not worksites. Furthermore, it will be the responsibility of the provider to develop activities in which the youth participate.

This concern is heightened by the fact that many providers report being awarded significantly more Younger Youth slots than they included in their responses to the RFP. In fact, several providers have reported that their wards decreased the number of jobs for Older Youth and increased the number of youth who would participate in this new model.

Moving Forward

In order to ensure that the ambitious goals of this new RFP are met, UNH urges that the City take the following actions:

1. Provide Baseline Funding to maintain the number of SYEP jobs for Older Youth. UNH is concerned that the reductions many providers have reported in Older Youth jobs will lead to fewer jobs available for this population. UNH urges that the City provides baseline funding to maintain the number of jobs for Older Youth in future summers.
2. Increase the rates providers are paid to account for new costs including increased staffing in the School-Based Model which requires in-depth counseling with participants and

coordination with a school, the Vulnerable Youth model which requires training for worksites and support for participants and the Younger Youth model which requires staffing and planning.

Work, Learn, and Grow

Background

Work, Learn and Grow (WLG) is the school year component to the Summer Youth Employment Program. WLG provides career readiness training and paid employment opportunities during the school year for youth enrolled in SYEP. WLG reinforces and enhances the benefits of SYEP.

The program was piloted in FY16 with \$16.2 million and allowed more than 6,000 youth who had taken part in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) the previous summer to engage in employment activities during the school year. Younger youth (14 and 15) engage in workforce preparation (workshops, job shadowing), while older youth (16-24) simply work at a private employer. Wages are paid by the City. The program was continued at the same funding level in FY17 and increased to \$19 million in FY 2018 and FY 2019.

The launch and expansion of WLG also support the work of SYEP providers. WLG gives SYEP providers the year-round staff they need to recruit and inspect worksites prior to the summer. SYEP

Moving Forward

UNH is a strong proponent of the WLG model. In order to strengthen the program UNH urges the City to baseline \$19.9 million for WLG in FY 2020 and develop a plan to expand WLG to serve a larger proportion high schooler students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to take any questions.