



**UNITED  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
HOUSES**

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

**FY 2025 Executive Budget Hearing:  
Committee on Children & Youth Services  
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Submitted by Nora Moran, Director of Policy & Advocacy  
May 10th, 2024**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nora Moran, and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, 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.

Youth programming has played a significant role throughout the history of New York City by engaging young people in programming that can expand their minds and opportunities, connecting families to other essential supports beyond after school, and helping youth navigate challenging times. Summer programming, including summer camps and the Summer Youth Employment Program, has long been the cornerstone of the positive youth development movement, offering exciting and supportive programs outside of the September-June school structure. It is crucial that New York City maintain and invest in its summer programs not only to offer youth and their caregivers safe spaces to be in the summer, but also to maintain the positive development, enrichment, and most importantly fun that comes with summer programs.

The Mayor's FY25 Executive Budget proposes a \$44.9 million program to eliminate the gap (PEG) for the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Leading up to the FY25 Preliminary and Executive Budget proposals, the Adams Administration cited economic uncertainty to justify a round of PEGs to City agencies. However, analyses from New York State

Comptroller DiNapoli and the Independent Budget Office (IBO) have called into question the need for budget cuts, given an anticipated surplus of more than \$2 billion.<sup>1 2</sup>

The Mayor has reversed some previously established PEGs from November 2023 for agencies such as DOE and NYPD, but has maintained all budget cuts for DYCD, and, in fact, announced new cuts in January's FY25 Preliminary Budget. DYCD's PEG will directly and indirectly impact the broad array of community-based programs supported by the agency. This PEG comes at a time when communities need services the most as our city faces an affordability crisis for families and. The Mayor's Management Report issued in January 2024 notes increased program utilization across many DYCD programs in FY24,<sup>3</sup> calling any proposed cuts—however they are framed—into question. **This \$44.9 million PEG must be restored in the FY25 Adopted Budget.** Instead of cutting this network of supports for our youth and families, we should be strengthening and expanding it, as well as creating further linkages between program models to ensure that the vast array of services are readily available to all New Yorkers. Instituting funding cuts to DYCD at a time when working families are faced with a crisis of unaffordability and the city has seen an influx of new families in need of supportive services is a grievous misstep and calls into question this administration's commitment to both our young people and their families.

This testimony will focus on recommendations to support and stabilize citywide youth services and strengthen the human services workforce including:

- Restore \$6.9 million to COMPASS Explore and SONYC afterschool programs;
- Restore \$19.6 million in Summer Rising funding to prevent the reduction of middle school programs;
- Baseline \$21.7 million in Adult Literacy funding and ensure all funding is included in the current RFP;
- Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative;
- Baseline the Promise NYC program with a \$25 million annual investment;
- Reduce barriers preventing asylum seeking families from accessing youth-serving programs;
- Invest in the human services workforce and make a long-term investment by creating and funding a prevailing wage schedule.

### **Restore \$6.9 Million to COMPASS Explore and SONYC Afterschool Programs**

COMPASS/SONYC programs provide afterschool and summer programming to school-aged youth across the city. Settlement houses collectively operate 140 school-based after-school programs. COMPASS/SONYC programs have struggled in recent years with low staff wages leading to recruitment and retention challenges, as well as vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process. Now that schools are consistently open and youth are engaging with in-person activities again, it's important to protect and invest in afterschool programs to ensure they have the staff and resources they need to support young New Yorkers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/print-2024-preliminary-budget-report-february.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-16-2023.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2024/dycd.pdf>

Unfortunately, the PEG from the November 2023 Plan proposed a \$6.9 million cut to afterschool programs. In January 2024, CBOs started receiving notices of cuts (described as “slot reductions”) to their FY25 SONYC<sup>4</sup> contracts. Simultaneously, COMPASS Explore<sup>5</sup> providers received notice that their contracts would be permanently ended on June 30, 2024, after their current one-year extension contract expires.

**This will result in the loss of 3,538 afterschool seats and the shrinking of the citywide afterschool system.** In light of growing demand for childcare services and the persistent lack of affordable care options for working families, this cut will be devastating for the families of New York City.

**In the FY25 budget, the City must restore \$6.9 million in afterschool funding by extending the COMPASS Explore contracts, and restoring cuts to SONYC programming.**

Furthermore, COMPASS/SONYC programs have not been re-procured in many years, leaving providers with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation or changes in the labor market. The upcoming RFP must reflect the true cost of providing high quality afterschool programming. In November 2023, UNH released a report that details this issue and includes model budgets for city-funded afterschool programs.<sup>6</sup> Our recommendations include:

- Establishing year-round, 12 month youth service contracts and streamlining the procurement process;
- Paying approved provider indirect rates in full, in accordance with the City’s Indirect Cost Rate Initiative;
  - Providers must be able to claim those rates at the outset and include them in budgets, not have a placeholder rate that later gets amended;
- Funding the true cost of afterschool programming and establishing a \$22 an hour wage floor
  - Contracts should also include year-over-year funding cost escalators, in accordance with inflation;
- Supporting staffing ratios appropriate for School Age Child Care (SACC) licensing for all 12 months of the year; and
- Prioritizing positive youth development principles.

To support the new RFP, the City Council should invest \$3 million in a new Youth Mental Health Council Initiative to provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs, allowing them to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs (see below for more information).

Finally, we urge DYCD to work with providers to develop a plan for serving youth with disabilities in COMPASS/SONYC programs. Recommendations include:

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<sup>4</sup> The SONYC model serves grades 6-8. Middle school youth are engaged in rigorous afterschool activities, structured as clubs, emphasizing student voice and choice.

<sup>5</sup> The COMPASS Explore model serves grades K-12 students. This unique model allowed providers to develop specialized programming to engage youth in experiential learning opportunities.

<sup>6</sup> UNH, *Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City*, November 2023

[https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991824/True\\_Cost\\_of\\_Afterschool\\_November\\_2023%281%29.pdf?1702991824](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991824/True_Cost_of_Afterschool_November_2023%281%29.pdf?1702991824)

- Providing funding for paraprofessional support and allow that paraprofessional staff to report directly to CBO staff;
- Enable CBOs to hire experts and trainers in multiple modalities of learning to support Education Specialists and other existing staff;
- Give program staff access to assistive technologies (and training on how to use them) like communicators (including speech-to-text devices), computer access tools, hearing and visual aids, and more present in their community centers; and
- Issue clear protocols for CBOs to seek out support when integrating a youth with a disability and have programs available to refer these youth to if the current arrangement is not fulfilling that young person's needs.

### **Restore \$19.6 Million in Summer Rising Funding to Prevent the Reduction of Middle School Programs**

DYCD has confirmed that Summer Rising, the partnership between DYCD and the DOE to provide integrated summer school and summer camp to elementary- and middle-school aged youth, will continue in Summer 2024. Despite several years of feedback where CBOs have raised challenges with this model—including issues with centralized DOE enrollment; a lack of choice for parents and families who wanted a more traditional summer camp experience; and inconsistent support for students with disabilities—there have been few clear changes or improvements made.

Despite these challenges, CBOs have worked hard to implement strong Summer Rising programs. However, the Adams Administration has proposed a \$19.6 million PEG to DYCD's Summer Rising budget. If maintained, this cut will result in a drastic reduction to programming for middle school students this summer - a complete cut to Friday programming and a 2-hour reduction to the remaining program days. This equates to a proposed loss of 18 hours of programming per week.

### **The City must restore \$19.6 million in Summer Rising funding to restore middle school programs.**

In addition, in order to make this model successful for all parties, but especially for children and families who deserve summer opportunities that fulfill their needs, the City must consider the following:

- DYCD and DOE should jointly invest in a comprehensive evaluation to determine the efficacy of the model;
- CBOs must have control over participant registration, which will especially help families who need additional digital and language support to apply for programming,
  - CBOs should be able to maintain their own rosters so that if there are young people who cannot attend the CBO portion of the day, CBOs have the power to unenroll that youth and give that slot to a young person who can attend so the slot does not go to waste;
- The City should allow youth and families to choose whether to attend summer school, camp, or both, and allow CBOs the chance to record how many young people choose which service; and

- In addition, Summer Rising 2024 can only be set up for success if there is increased and coordinated support for students with disabilities and students in temporary housing to make sure CBOs have resources they need to properly serve these young people.

**Baseline \$21.7 million in Adult Literacy funding and ensure all funding is included in the current RFP.**

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

Today in New York City, there are nearly one million adults living in New York City with limited to no proficiency in English (i.e. those who reported that they did not speak English or did not speak English well). Moreover, over the past year, more than 170,000 asylum seekers and refugees have arrived in New York after fleeing life-threatening social, political, and economic conditions in their home countries. For many of these adults, limited skills impact almost every aspect of their lives, making it difficult to support their children in school, access health care, secure and maintain living-wage jobs, advocate for their rights, and fully participate in their new communities.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) currently has an open Request for Proposal (RFP) that will fund community-based organizations to lead adult basic education, high school equivalency, and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs for the next three to six years. The Literacy Services RFP application closed on April 5, and DYCD maintains that new contracts will be awarded by July 1, 2024.

UNH is grateful to the City Council for calling on the administration to fully invest in Adult Literacy programs in its response to the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. Unfortunately, despite our collective efforts and our strong support from the City Council, the Mayor's Executive Budget **cuts \$1 million** from DYCD Adult Literacy programs for FY25 – from \$11,853,400 in the DYCD Literacy RFP to \$10,803,000 in the Executive Budget.

Earlier in the year, the Mayor's FY25 Preliminary Budget included \$21.7 million for DYCD RFP-funded Adult Literacy programs. UNH and our City Council champions called for this additional \$10 million to be baselined in the RFP. However, during the City Council's preliminary budget oversight hearings, we were told by the administration that the \$10 million was a "technical" error. (Please note that none of these figures include the \$2.5 million in Council Discretionary Pilot funding or the \$4 million in Council Discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative funding.)

At the same time, the \$11.85 million budget set forth in the RFP is \$5 million less than the \$16.83 million in administration-side funding for DYCD Adult Literacy contracts in FY24. This means that this RFP will serve just over 9,100 students annually, a significant decrease from the 11,000 – 16,000 that DYCD has reported over the past few years.

If this additional funding could get baselined and included in the Literacy Services RFP, we ask the City Council to call on DYCD to take action through some combination of the following steps:

- Baseline \$21.8 million for DYCD Adult Literacy programs to restore cuts and maintain service levels. This requires adding \$11 million to the \$10.8 million in the Mayor's FY25 Executive Budget which will:
  - Restore the \$6 million that the FY25 Executive Budget has cut from the \$16.8 million in administration funding in the FY24 Adopted Budget, and
  - Provide an additional \$5 million to maintain community-based adult literacy services for roughly the same number of students at the new per-student rate that will take effect in FY25.
- Maintain the \$4 million in City Council Discretionary Funding for the Adult Literacy Initiative.
- Double the funding for the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project from \$2.5 million to \$5 million and expand the number of programs that receive this funding.
- Change the name of the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project to the City Council Adult Literacy Innovation Project to better reflect the purpose of this funding going forward.

Given that contracts under the new Literacy Services RFP are set to begin July 1, **we urge this Committee to get clarity on the funding and push for a baseline of the full \$21.8 million.**

### **Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative**

The COVID-19 pandemic had long-lasting effects on young people, including their mental health. During the first few months of the pandemic, 1 in 600 Black children and 1 in 700 Latinx children lost their parent or caregiver to the pandemic in New York State, more than double the rate of white children. Losing a caregiver is associated with a range of negative health effects, including lower self-esteem, a higher risk of suicide, and symptoms of mental illness. According to pediatricians, addressing the impact of family death on young people will “require intentional investment to address individual, community, and structural inequalities.” In late 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children’s Hospital Association (CHA) declared a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health; and the Surgeon General followed suit by declaring a Youth Mental Health Crisis. Furthermore, according to a 2022 survey from the Institute of Education Sciences, 69 percent of public schools reported an increase in students seeking mental health services that year, but 43 percent of schools “moderately agreed” that they could “effectively provide mental health service to all students in need.” Only 13 percent “strongly agreed.”

Given these growing mental health needs among young people, we propose using approximately \$3 million in new Council Initiative funds to create a new Youth Mental Health initiative. This new initiative would provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs – such as Beacons, Cornerstones, COMPASS/SONYC, and others—with a focus on out-of-school time. Programs would be able to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs – much in the same way the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative functions for older adults. These funds could also offer supports for youth workers when dealing with mental health crises, or creating proactive programming for mental health wellness.

The communities facing the highest risk for mental health concerns are the same communities who have historically lacked access to appropriate mental health services. It is generally accepted that youth mental health services are more effective when provided in a safe and trusted setting, which makes CBO-led youth programs the perfect environment for these supports. If we genuinely want to confront this crisis, it is vital that our young people have access to comprehensive mental health services that address the many stressors they are facing with substantive and professional care.

### **Baseline the Promise NYC Program with a \$25 Million Annual Investment**

Due to restrictions on certain funding sources, the only public early childhood education programs that undocumented children can directly join are 3-K and Pre-K programs and federal Head Start. This leaves a major gap in child care for undocumented immigrants, including the tens of thousands of recent asylum seekers in New York City. To help address this challenge, UNH urges New York City to invest \$25 million in the FY 2025 Adopted Budget to baseline the new Promise NYC program to provide subsidized child care to low-income undocumented children.

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). The 6-month program launched in January 2023, and after a six-week period of administrative preparation, providers were able to begin outreach to families in February. Providers are contracted to serve a total of 600 children citywide for the remainder of the fiscal year through June.

For NMIC (Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation), this venture into child care services was new for the organization, yet they were chosen due to their presence in both Manhattan and the Bronx and the strong relationships they hold with the community they serve. Unsurprisingly, they did not need extensive outreach efforts; the program's popularity was swift and substantial, emphasizing the pressing need for child care services, particularly among undocumented community members. However, the budget allocation still falls short of addressing the demand, with NMIC only being able to serve 110 children in Manhattan and 125 in the Bronx, while having over 400 children waitlisted.

Promise NYC was funded with \$16 million in the City's FY 2024 budget after extensive support and negotiation from the Council. However, this funding was secured before the majority of new asylum seekers arrived in New York City, and it was not baselined, so programs are anticipating that child care will end on June 30th and undocumented families will abruptly be left without a child care arrangement.

**We urge the City to extend funding for Promise NYC to \$20 million in the FY 2025 budget and each year thereafter so that undocumented families can continue to access the affordable, subsidized child care they need.** This investment will allow providers to expand the number of children they serve, including funding for increased staff capacity necessary for invoicing and matching families to available child care providers. With an expanded budget, the goal is to further facilitate families' access to care and serve as a pipeline into the K-12 school system,

solidifying its status as a crucial community resource. In sum, Promise NYC has emerged as a lifeline for families facing childcare challenges, illustrating the positive impact that accessible child care can have on individuals, families, and communities.

### **Reduce Barriers Preventing Asylum Seeking Families from Accessing Youth-Serving Programs**

Even with the creation of Promise NYC, newly arrived families face many hurdles in accessing childcare and youth programs, challenges that New York's CBOs are unable to address without financial and administrative support from the City.

Settlement houses have been welcoming immigrant New Yorkers since their founding in the late 19th century, and today's wave of the newest New Yorkers is no exception. Settlement houses are experts at pivoting services to support the most urgent needs in their neighborhoods. According to a September 2023 survey of UNH members, 72% reported an increased presence of asylum seekers in their youth programs.<sup>7</sup>

However, settlement houses have described several barriers to young people and families engaging in these programs:

- Lack of transportation - Youth residing in shelters who participate in afterschool programming are not able to take advantage of free bussing that is provided at the end of the school day.
- Need for additional bilingual staff - With an increase of youth whose first language is not English, providers have stated a need for additional bilingual staff who can support youth in their own language. This issue is compounded by the persistent staffing shortage in early childhood and school-aged youth programs due to low wages.
- Inconsistency due to 60-day shelter timeline - Even when families are able to overcome other barriers to enroll their young people in childcare or afterschool programs, they may receive notice and be required to move sites, displacing young people from the program they were enrolled in.

The City's inability to provide consistency for newly arrived youth and provide supports to keep them enrolled in childcare and afterschool programs is a missed opportunity to support our newest New Yorkers. However, we must note that with the current proposed cuts, making these changes to expand access to afterschool services to newly arrived New Yorkers will only create an inundated system that is unable to accommodate the need. **For the City to appropriately tackle this issue, it must simultaneously restore the cuts to afterschool, early childhood education, and summer services, while removing barriers to access.**

### **Invest In The Human Services Workforce and Make a Long-Term Investment By Creating and Funding a Prevailing Wage Schedule**

Human services workers in New York City are grossly underpaid. Across UNH's network of settlement houses in New York City, 76% of their total budget comes from government sources,

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<sup>7</sup> UNH, *Settlement Houses Supporting the Newest New Yorkers: Voices from the Field*, [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991539/UNH\\_Voices\\_from\\_the\\_Field\\_Report\\_1252023%281%29.pdf?1702991539](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991539/UNH_Voices_from_the_Field_Report_1252023%281%29.pdf?1702991539)



and 65% of that is from New York City. Unfortunately, contracts from New York City often do not include sufficient funding to pay workers a fair and dignified wage.

Wages have failed to keep up with both inflation and changes to the job market, and as a result the human services sector continues to sit on the cliff of a staffing crisis. On average, more than a third (35%) of UNH settlement house members reported double-digit job vacancy rates of 10% or higher in 2023, up from 31 percent the previous year, and nearly two-thirds (65%) of UNH settlement house members reported that job positions remained vacant for 3 months or more in the past year, including 14% who said that positions remained vacant for 6 months or longer.

Without increased budgets in government contracts to cover wage increases, nonprofits will be unable to recruit and train the next generation of nonprofit leaders, setting future New Yorkers up for significant barriers to accessing services that grow over time. Further, insufficient staffing has made it increasingly difficult for nonprofits to serve New Yorkers, leading to under-enrollment and program closures which then leads to budget reductions and a vicious cycle that harms New Yorkers seeking services.

We thank the City Council and Mayor Adams for funding a 3-year Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human service workers. This will provide immediate relief, we must do more to undo years of budgets that left behind human service workers.

### ***Create a Prevailing Wage Schedule for Human Services Workers***

UNH supports Int 0734-2024 (sponsored by Council Member Stevens) to establish a prevailing wage for city-contracted human service workers, which would require City agencies to include sufficient funding to cover those wages in contracts, and track implementation of those wages by human service contractors. While prevailing wage schedules are an imperfect tool to address the current conditions faced by human service workers, it is a significant improvement from the status quo. This process to design a true prevailing wage system is arduous and will require careful analysis, but we cannot continue to afford ignoring the need. For years, the government at every level has asked nonprofit partners to do “more with less.” This dynamic has pushed our sector to a real breaking point, and our workforce has suffered the consequences. It’s time for us to look beyond stopgap measures and towards efforts that would have a long-lasting impact on the human service sector.

**UNH urges the City Council to pass CM Stevens’ prevailing wage legislation and fully fund it in the FY25 budget to limit impacts to programs.**

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at [nmoran@unhny.org](mailto:nmoran@unhny.org).