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**Testimony before the New York City Council Committees  
on Youth Services and Finance**

**Oversight Hearing: “Examining the Implementation of the Young Men’s Initiative”**

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Good afternoon, my name is Kevin Douglas and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses to testify on the implementation of the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI). I would like to thank Youth Services Chair Fidler and Finance Chair Recchia for convening this important hearing.

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), a membership organization of 37 non-profit settlement houses across the five boroughs serving over 500,000 New Yorkers each year, is committed to promoting and strengthening a neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live.

Along with the Community Service Society and the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, UNH is also a coordinating member of the Campaign for Tomorrow’s Workforce (CTW), a coalition of over forty organizations dedicated to advancing policy solutions to reconnect young adults between 16 and 24 to education and career opportunities.

In the course of serving this vulnerable population for many years, our members have gained significant “on the ground experience”, and are attuned to the needs of disconnected youth-young adults between the ages of 16-24 who are not in school and not connected to the labor market. From this experience, we know the challenges facing young black and Latino men are particularly troubling.

Indeed, even before the American Community Survey revealed that 20% of all New Yorkers live below the poverty line, it was known that the rate of black and Latino youth living in poverty in NYC has historically hovered near 30%.

To cite additional findings from David Bank’s and Ana Oliveria’s report to the Mayor: while the 4 year graduation rate for white males between 16-24 is only 70%, the significantly lower rates for black and Latino males at 48% and 47% respectively, suggest failures in of many of the systems and institutions designed to help young people succeed. However, if it is possible to pick the most troubling statistic revealed in this report, it would be that 84% of all admissions to NYC’s juvenile justice facilities are young black and Latino males.

It is clear that a crisis exists in NYC regarding the trajectories on which many of our black and Latino youth find themselves, due in large part to challenges they inherit simply by virtue of their birth. UNH, like many others in this room, was pleased to hear Mayor Bloomberg's announcement in early August of the Young Men's Initiative. In the Mayor's words, the initiative is designed to be the "nation's boldest and most comprehensive effort to tackle the broad disparities slowing the advancement of black and Latino young men." UNH applauds the attention the Mayor has brought to this crisis and is eager to partner with the City to reduce these stark disparities.

In fact, several UNH members- BronxWorks, Union Settlement Association, CAMBA and the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation- are among the CBOs administering the Young Adult Literacy Program recently expanded as the first component of YMI. The Young Adult Literacy Program provides literacy and math instruction, case management services, participant incentives (\$50-\$100/week) and opportunities for internships to youth aged 16-24 not in school or working, and with literacy skills between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade level (Pre-GED). This program represents a key model for engaging youth. By limiting participation to 16-24 year olds, instruction and supports can be tailored to the needs of young adults, which can often be lost in traditional adult literacy programming. UNH is pleased that this programming is being expanded.

However, UNH also has concerns related to the bigger picture facing black and Latino youth. We know that looking at youth aged 16-24 only represents a snapshot in time that does not capture the context of their lives leading up to their young adult years. In the settlement house model, our support to individuals extends throughout the stages of their development. This means that in addition to young adult, adult and senior services, we also provide early childhood education and after school programming for children and adolescents.

If the City hopes to not only improve outcomes for the current generation of black and Latino youth, but to fundamentally shift the arc of possibilities for future generations, it is imperative that investments in the formative years of our City's young people be preserved.

To this end, we offer the following reflection on the City's FY'12 budget:

-In early childhood education, 59 classrooms were closed, leading to a loss of 1,200 slots. Further, a significant portion of the early childhood system is funded through one year appropriations, meaning that additional child care slots are already at risk in the next fiscal year. The fact that only 27% of NYC children eligible for early childhood education are being served is evidenced by the long waiting lists for community based slots around the city.

-In after-school programming, also known as "Out of School Time" (OST), \$8.5million dollars were cut. These funds support programming that provides safe space for children and youth to receive homework assistance, engage in recreational activities and eat nutritious snacks. In total, roughly 46,000 of these slots have been lost in the last four years.

-Also cut by \$4.4million were Beacons, school-based community centers open to children, youth and adults which also provide educational activities such as tutoring, GED programming and college preparation workshops.

-In the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which has provided the first job for thousands of New Yorkers, and allows youth to gain valuable employment skills that prepare them for integration into the workforce, only 30,628 young adults out of 131,119 applicants were able to obtain a job- the lowest number since 2004.

We point out these reductions in these critical childhood and youth development programs to highlight the larger context of the rapidly contracting opportunities available to black and Latino youth before they emerge as potential candidates for the Young Men's Initiative. It is critical that the City continues to make these opportunities available as it begins to implement the education, justice, health and employment components of the YMI.

UNH is also interested in better understanding the funding model behind the YMI. While a significant portion, approximately \$60 million of the \$127.5 million three year price tag, comes from philanthropic support, another \$67.5 million represents City Tax Levy (CTL) funding.

In light of the aforementioned reductions to programs that serve black and Latino children, youth and young adults, and the recently announced PEGs for all City agencies including the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), Department of Education (DOE) and the Administration for Children and Families (ACS), the question of how existing opportunities will be maintained takes on increased urgency.

In summary, UNH appreciates the recognition the YMI has brought to the issue of the sharp disparities young black and Latino men experience in NYC, and our members stand ready to partner with the City to bridge the gaps in service to this population. In moving forward, United Neighborhood Houses and the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce urge the City to follow the following recommendations:

- 1) Ensure that the YMI's components are implemented in a targeted and coordinated fashion to maximize their effectiveness. If the initiative is rolled out as a series of independent projects and programs, it will diminish the odds of YMI having an appreciable and lasting impact on the City's black and Latino male population.

- 2) Fully leverage the unique capabilities and experience CBOs, including settlement houses, in engaging a range of diverse populations. CBOs often have connections to young black and Latino community members disconnected from, and distrustful of, traditional governmental institutions.

- 3) Be transparent in discussing the financial composition of YMI CTL investments, specifically distinguishing between "new" and "expanded/continued funding". The City should also find a balance between new investments and sustained support for existing and valued programming; both can create positive pathways for black and Latino youth to follow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify this afternoon.