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**Testimony presented by Anthony Ng
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**Before the Immigration Committee of the New York City Council
Kendall Stewart, Chair**

**Oversight Hearing – “New York City’s Interest in the
Comprehensive Immigration Reform Debate”**

April 13, 2007

Good morning. My name is Anthony Ng, and I am the Senior Legislative Advocate at United Neighborhood Houses of New York, Inc. (UNH). UNH, founded in 1919, is the nonprofit membership organization for 35 settlement houses and community centers in New York City. Our member agencies comprise one of the largest human service systems in New York City and the largest group of settlements in the nation. 8,000 employees operate programs and activities in over 300 locations, reaching 500,000 New Yorkers each year. Services provided by our members include: early childhood education, after-school programs, teen centers, GED classes, job training, tutoring, recreation, meals and supportive services for the elderly, mental health counseling, drug prevention, and art, music and drama programs.

The human services delivered by our members are utilized by both immigrants and non-immigrants alike. To reach immigrants with these services, they are delivered in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner. UNH member agencies have their central office in, or have program sites located in some of the City’s major immigrant communities such as Jackson Heights, Sunset Park, Flatbush, East Harlem, Tremont, Flushing, Coney Island, and Chinatown, which collectively, have high Latino, Caribbean, West African, East Asian, South Asian, and Russian populations.

As you know, in December of 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed their version of an immigration reform bill that included provisions to make it a felony to be undocumented and present in the U.S. It also criminalized anyone that sought to give aid to the undocumented. Immigrant communities and their allies across the country voiced strong opposition towards this bill in numerous rallies and marches across the nation last Spring. In May of 2006, the Senate passed their version of immigration reform, which offered a 3-tiered solution for undocumented immigrants to earn legalization. It also included requirements for immigrants to learn English, and pay fines. The House and Senate bills from last year had clear differences, and 2006 concluded without a conference committee forming to reconcile the differences between each bill. As a result, immigration reform efforts would have to begin anew in 2007.

The recently introduced Security Through Regularized Immigration and A Vibrant Economy (STRIVE) Act of 2007 from U.S. House Representatives Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) represents the opening salvo in the efforts of this Congress to address immigration reform. The bill is a good starting point, but like last year's Senate-passed bill, the STRIVE Act is an amalgam of measures to offer legalization, and address border security. The bill includes provisions that:

- Provide temporary status and a path to eventual permanent residence for many of the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. via whichever one of three new mechanisms for which they may qualify:
 - "Earned legalization" for workers and their spouses and minor children who have lived and worked here since June 1, 2006. Immigrants that qualify for legalization in this manner would first need to leave the U.S., and return legally. They would also have to pay a \$2,000 fine and back taxes, and pass background and security checks. If after six years they have learned English and civics, kept a clean record, and the head of household has left and reentered the U.S. legally, they could become legal permanent residents, a step toward citizenship.
 - The DREAM Act for individuals who arrived at least 5 years before the date of enactment of the STRIVE Act at the age of 15 or younger and have graduated from high school; or
 - AgJOBS for certain agricultural workers.
- Reform the legal immigration system to significantly reduce family and employment immigration waiting lists and backlogs;
- Create a large new worker visa program with features intended to avoid the constant abuses inherent in past and current guestworker programs;
- Impose a mandatory electronic employment verification system for new hires that would apply to all employers and workers;
- Address illegal border crossings by further militarizing the border region with a smaller number of provisions intended to protect the human and civil rights of the residents of that region;
- Make numerous changes in interior immigration enforcement including new and increased penalties, increased detention space, new identity documents with biometric identifiers, and reduced due process.

From analyzing last year's Senate bill, and the current STRIVE Act, it is clear that legalization, citizenship, and learn English provisions are important components that are being considered, and will likely become part of any final immigration reform measure. Inclusion of these provisions will add to the already high demand in New York City for key immigrant services such as ESOL and civics classes, citizenship assistance, and immigration legal services. We know that the City Council understands the importance

of these services, and thank you for your strong leadership and ongoing support for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI), which was funded at \$9.25 million in FY2007. **We urge that IOI is restored by at least \$9.25 million in the final FY2008 budget, and urge that New York City expands funding for these vital immigrant services to ensure that it is ready to respond to immigration reform.**

We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council on IOI and other vital immigrant services funding for New York City, and to ensure that these services help realize the promise of fair and humane immigration reform.

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Founded in 1919, UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 35 agencies working at more than 300 sites to provide high quality services and activities to more than half million New Yorkers each year. For over 85 years, UNH has worked with its members to strengthen families and improve neighborhoods throughout the City. UNH supports the work of its members through advocacy and public policy research and analysis, technical assistance and funding and by promoting program replication and collaboration among its members.

UNH Members: Boys & Girls Harbor-CAMBA-Center for Family Life in Sunset Park - Chinese American Planning Council - Citizens Advice Bureau - Claremont Neighborhood Centers - Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation - East Side House Settlement - Educational Alliance - Queens Community House (formerly the Forest Hills Community House) - Goddard Riverside Community Center - Grand Street Settlement - Greenwich House - Hamilton-Madison House - Hartley House - Henry Street Settlement - Hudson Guild - Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House - Kingsbridge Heights Community Center - Lenox Hill Neighborhood House - Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center - Mosholu Montefiore Community - Riverdale Neighborhood House - SCAN New York - School Settlement Association - Shorefront YM-WHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc - Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers - St. Matthew's and St. Timothy's Neighborhood Center - St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation - Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center - Sunnyside Community Services - Third Street Music School Settlement - Union Settlement Association - United Community Centers - University Settlement Society