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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the Joint Hearing of the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate  
Committees on Children and Families and Committees on Education  
Regarding the Transition of Five Year Old to Kindergarten and  
The Impacts of Underfunding New York City's Administration for Children's Services**

May 28, 2009

Thank you Chairs Montgomery, Oppenheimer, Scarborough and Nolan and members of the Senate and Assembly Committees on Children and Families and Education for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. My name is Gregory Brender and I am here on behalf of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) where I serve as a policy analyst. UNH is the membership organization of 36 settlement houses and community centers in New York City. UNH member agencies provide early childhood education through ACS funded child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, Universal Pre-Kindergarten and other programs. UNH members also provide OST programs for youth some of which will be expected to provide after school for children who in previous years would have been eligible for full day child care.

We are grateful for the State legislature's work to preserve child care. We thank you for keeping \$356 million in federal Child Care and Community Development Block Grant funds dedicated to child care and out of the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) Block Grant. By keeping child care funding separate from the block grant, the legislature has ensured that child care will not be forced to compete with other mandated services for limited funding. We also appreciate that the State invested over \$36 million in TANF funds for child care.

We are also glad to see that legislation to remove the child support requirement, which requires single working parents to present proof that they are seeking court-ordered child support in order to enroll their child in subsidized care. This requirement creates an obstacle to enrolling children in subsidized care for eligible children whose parents need child care in order to stay working. Assemblymember Scarborough is sponsoring legislation which has passed the Assembly in two previous sessions which would remove this requirement and Senator Montgomery has sponsored companion legislation in the Senate which has already passed in this session. We hope that this legislation will be signed by the Governor soon.

The closure of classrooms for five year olds is one part of the drastic impact that the underfunding of the Administration for Children's Services is having on early childhood education in New York City. These impacts include:

- The loss of approximately 1,300 slots in contracted centers through the closure of 5 year old classrooms.
- A funding reduction, called "cost allocation enforcement" which reduces funds to programs that offer 4 year olds UPK education as part of a full day of care.
- A funding reduction to Head Start delegate agencies in New York City.
- The elimination of services offered by ACS resource areas and increased responsibilities for child care providers.
- The elimination of approximately 3,000 vouchers for children of families involved in non-ACS social services, children of parent who are ill or incapacitated and children of parents who are looking for work.

Below I have outlined the impacts of these cuts on providers' ability to provide early education and care to the children of New York City.

### **Capacity Eliminations**

Funds from President Obama's economic recovery package will be used to preserve nearly 2,000 of the approximately 3,300 slots that are slated to be lost due to the closure of classrooms for five year old children. The City plans to use those 2,000 slots to meet the needs of 3 and 4 year old children.

However, the remaining 1,300 slots will likely be lost and the capacity of the City's child care system will be dramatically reduced despite many centers maintaining long waiting lists of eligible children.

Already 134 vacant slots have been eliminated through the closure of 9 classrooms in 7 underutilized centers. The additional loss of 1,300 slots will make it more difficult for parents to find early care and education.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons that parents of kindergarten aged children put their children in ACS funded child care instead of kindergarten is the full day of care available through ACS funded child care. It is especially important during this recession when low-income parents are struggling to stay employed that quality full day care remain accessible to their children.

New York City's five year old children have a legal right to kindergarten. But parents may still find it difficult to find a slot for their children that can be combined with an OST program to provide full day care. The City's Department of Youth and Community Development has stated that it will be able to accommodate the needs of kindergarten aged children who need a full day of care. Yet, cuts made to OST programs will make this difficult and lead to fewer OST slots for older children.

Also, as OST enrollment will likely not start until the summer, parents will not know until very close to the beginning of the school year whether or where their children are enrolled. Parents need to know how their children will get from kindergarten in a public school to an OST program which may be held at a different site. Five year old children should not be expected to travel without adult supervision. This is not a problem for parents of children who are in ACS funded full day care but needs to be addressed for children who will be in both Kindergarten and OST.

### **UPK Cost Allocation Enforcement**

The City cut \$6 million in City FY 2009 and will cut \$12 million in City FY 2010 from programs which offer Universal Pre-Kindergarten as part of full day child care. As you know, Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) provides four year old children with educational opportunities that prepare them to succeed in Kindergarten and beyond. As State funding for UPK is limited to 2.5 hours a day, this program cannot meet the needs of most working parents unless it is part of a full day of care.

To provide a full day of care to four year olds in UPK, many ACS contracted providers offer full day coverage by blending funding from both UPK and ACS child care to create a program which meets the specific educational requirements of UPK while providing a full day of care. In order for the City to continue to draw down state funds for UPK, UPK programs must adhere to educational standards which include:

- Employing staff and program directors who are either New York State certified teachers or working towards certification.
- Meeting curriculum standards aligned with State and local learning standards.
- Providing ongoing assessments of each child's language development, cognitive skills, and social development.
- Providing health and nutritional screening for each child.

In March 2009, ACS notified providers who provide full day programs for UPK students of immediate funding reductions, called "cost allocation enforcements" that must be taken by June 30<sup>th</sup>. These cuts are severe- as high as \$72,000 in New York City FY 2009 and \$144,000 in New York City FY 2010 in the next year for one Bronx provider. Drastic cuts such as these force providers to decrease the services that they can offer to children.

For example, a program in Manhattan, which was cut by \$44,000 in New York City FY 2009 and will be cut by \$88,000 in New York City FY 2010, reported that they will need to enroll fewer special needs students next fall because they will not be able to provide funding for the extra teachers that are legally required when serving special needs students.

Another agency in Brooklyn which has 44 UPK students enrolled in a full day program had its \$92,000 budget cut by \$38,000 in the middle of the school year. Because of this cut, the program was forced to discontinue parts of their curriculum and cancelled classes in art and

dance. They also gave their teachers a \$6,000 annual pay cut. Some of these teachers had enrolled in graduate school specifically to meet the certification requirements for UPK and will now be forced to finance their education with increasingly limited income.

We hope that the State will give New York City and counties outside of New York City the flexibility to use UPK funds for full day programs. Until that happens, offering UPK education as part of a full day of care is the only way to bring the benefits of UPK education to the children of working parents who need a full day of care. We must strengthen these programs to ensure that the benefits of UPK can become truly universal.

### **Head Start Cuts**

Through both Federal and City funds Head Start providers are able to provide eligible 3 and 4 year old children with services including:

- Education to help children grow socially, intellectually and emotionally.
- Full day care in some programs.
- Health services such as immunizations and early identification of medical problems.
- Outreach to families using family workers who help to connect families to other services.
- Nutrition and food assistance.

New York City Head Start providers have had their budgets cut. ACS has imposed a 3.03% across the board reduction for Head Start providers as part of an effort to achieve a \$4 million cost savings in the Head Start budget. Furthermore, providers are now required to self-fund any salary increases that are mandated in their staff's city negotiated union contracts.

These changes will make it more difficult for Head Start providers to retain qualified staff and may dilute program quality.

### **Elimination of Priority 7, 8 and 9 Vouchers**

The proposed New York City FY 2010 Executive Budget eliminates child care vouchers for three categories of families who are currently eligible. This will result in the loss of approximately 3,000 vouchers and a disinvestment of more than \$20.2 million. Priority 7 vouchers serve approximately 2,000 children whose families are involved with non-ACS social services. Priority 8 and Priority 9 vouchers serve approximately 1,000 children whose parents are ill or incapacitated or are looking for work respectively. Children currently using these vouchers will be able to access center based care if they can find an open slot. However, no more children will be able to receive care because they meet the criteria of priorities 7, 8 or 9.

### **Increased Responsibilities for Child Care Providers**

Cuts to ACS require the agency to significantly reduce its internal headcount. This has led already to layoffs in all areas of ACS including in child care. The borough resource areas which evaluate and approve applications for child care subsidies are losing a significant amount of staff

and will be cutting back the services that they provide to parents. Starting next year, parents will no longer be able to meet with an ACS representative in their borough's resource area and all ACS child care programs will be required to perform community based enrollment.

While many UNH members already perform community based enrollment, child care budgets do not include funds to for these services. Providers have scrambled to find staff from other programs, such as Head Start family workers to help families with the significant amount of paperwork that they are required to present to ACS in order to obtain a subsidy.

We support the City's goal of ensuring that every child care slot is used and all centers are fully enrolled. However, this can only be achieved by increasing the resources available to providers and parents. Providers nonetheless face a situation where their responsibilities are increasing while their funding levels are decreased.

Therefore, we urge New York State and New York City to provide additional support for child care in New York City. It is our understanding that the State expects to receive as much as \$115 million in stimulus funds for child care. We hope that the State and City both use their tax levy funding to support child care and invest federal funds for this purpose.

We urge the State and City to work together to:

- Restore the \$12 million cut from programs that offer *Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Education* as part of a full day of care.
- Restore \$5 million for the *1,300 child care slots* that are currently used by five year old children and are slated for elimination. Beginning in the fall of 2009, ACS Child Care will no longer serve five year olds. The City is using federal stimulus funds to preserve 2,000 of the approximated 3,300 child care slots that currently serve five-year olds; these 2,000 slots will be used to serve eligible younger children. However, the remaining 1,300 slots will be eliminated in June 2009. These slots must be preserved in order to maintain New York City's child care capacity.
- Restore the \$20.2 million cut to child care that will eliminate *3,000 child care vouchers* for children whose parents are ill or looking for work, or children of families involved in non-ACS social services. These vouchers must be preserved in order to maintain New York City's child care capacity.
- Provide \$4 million to prevent cuts to *Head Start providers*. The City is requiring Head Start providers to achieve a \$4 million cost savings, for example through a 3.03% cut from all Head Start contracts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

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**United Neighborhood Houses (UNH)**, founded in 1919, is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 36 agencies working at more than 400 sites to provide high quality services and activities to a half million New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy and capacity-building activities.

*UNH Members: 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 - 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 Center - Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation - Project Hospitality - Queens Community House - 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*