



neighborhood family services coalition



Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies



Testimony Before the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) **2009 Draft Plan Hearing**

August 13, 2008

Good evening. My name is Gregory Brender and I am a policy analyst for United Neighborhood Houses, the federation of 35 settlement houses and community centers throughout New York City, more than half of whom operate in NYCHA facilities and serve public housing residents. I am here tonight on behalf of UNH as well as several of our colleagues in the human services community including Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, UJA-Federation of New York, Human Services Council, Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, Coalition of Senior Centers and Services and Citizens' Committee for Children. Together we represent the majority of the human service agencies serving residents in public housing and the city's oldest independent child advocacy organization.

We appreciate NYCHA's commitment to providing New Yorkers with strong communities and not solely a roof over their heads. Working with the City and with non-profits, NYCHA has strived to ensure that human services are available to their tenants. Early childhood education programs, operating in space provided at low or no-cost rates, nurture and educate young children during their crucial early years and give their parents' the opportunity to work and pursue education. After school programs provide young New Yorkers a positive and healthy environment. Senior centers and NORCs run by nonprofits and by NYCHA itself, have ensured that older New Yorkers have a place to socialize and participate in activities. Community Centers in NYCHA developments offer a range of services including job preparedness training and athletics. These and other community programs that operate in NYCHA facilities must not be lost.

The decisions that NYCHA's leadership must make are the result of years of chronic underfunding of NYCHA by all levels of government. The city and the country's housing crisis, has made the need for NYCHA's work even more apparent. Yet, Federal support of NYCHA's operating costs has dropped precipitously. Since 2001, decreasing Congressional appropriations

have cost NYCHA \$611 million in federal operating subsidies. Although NYCHA manages sixteen state constructed developments which are not eligible for federal operating subsidies, the State has not contributed operating subsidies to NYCHA since 1996. Similarly, the City does not provide operating subsidies for the five City constructed developments, which are also ineligible for federal operating subsidies. These shortfalls, along with significant payments to New York City to support centers and a variety of other services, have forced NYCHA to spread out the dollars earned from rent and Federal subsidies even further. Given the level of operating deficits, NYCHA is being forced to choose between funding direct housing costs or paying for critical services for children, youth, families and seniors. This is a bad decision to have to make and our City's leaders should not allow this to happen. Public housing residents are entitled to the same level of support services that other New Yorkers receive.

NYCHA's fiscal crisis will affect all areas of human services provided to public housing residents. The decrease in operating support at the Federal, State and City levels clearly jeopardizes NYCHA's ability to provide and pay for such services. Seen as a way to stabilize and effectively reach local tenants, human services, particularly for youth and seniors, have been operating in public housing for decades. NYCHA residents and New Yorkers from adjacent communities benefit from 146 Senior Centers, (100 operated by DFTA, 46 operated by NYCHA), 136 Community Centers operated by NYCHA and its nonprofit partners, 10 Naturally Occurring Retirement Community's Social Support Programs, 117 child care and Head Start programs, and 37 Out-of-School Time (OST) comprehensive after-school programs, funded by DYCD

We urge NYCHA and city leaders to work together to ensure that the current budget crisis does not cause the loss of needed services for public housing residents.

We urge the City of New York to:

- Commit funding necessary to support
 - Senior centers and NORCs
 - Space costs for after school, and child care and Head Start programs
 - Community center programming
- Provide operating subsidies for the City constructed public housing developments which are not eligible for federal operating subsidies.
- Waive the payments that NYCHA currently pays to the city for services such as police and sanitation.

We urge New York State to:

- Provide operating subsidies for the sixteen state constructed public housing developments which are not eligible for federal operating subsidies.

We urge the Federal Government to:

- Adopt the request of Senator Charles Schumer and Senator Olympia Snowe for \$500 million for the Public Housing Operating Fund and \$500 million for the Public Housing Capital Fund in the second Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 emergency supplemental appropriation.

We urge NYCHA to continue and sustain its commitment to on-site human services for public housing residents. NYCHA should take all steps necessary to prevent the closure or displacement of human service programs which operate on NYCHA properties and serve public housing residents.

I would like to address my final comments to our City, State and Federal elected officials who represent public housing residents. You must make the commitment to ensuring that public housing and services for public housing residents survive. Now, during this period of financial hardship for low-income and middle-income New Yorkers, government leaders must commit to protecting the human services which keep New York's communities strong.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with NYCHA, public housing residents and government leaders to ensure that quality human services remain available for public housing residents.

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