



For Immediate Release: Wednesday, May 20, 2009

CONTACT:

Clara Botstein, United Neighborhood Houses, 212-967-0322 ext. 316, 914-388-0699,
cbotstein@unhny.org

Press Release

BROAD COALITION CALLS ON CITY LEADERS TO RESTORE CORE HUMAN SERVICE PROGRAMS FOR NEW YORK CITY'S MOST VULNERABLE – CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND SENIORS

Clients, providers, and advocates call for human service funding restorations to protect families and communities in need during this economic downturn

City Hall, NY – Clients, providers, and advocates joined together on the steps of City Hall to voice support for core human service programs serving New York City's most vulnerable – children, youth, and seniors – and to urge City leaders to restore harmful cuts to these programs. The FY2010 City Budget contains millions in cuts to child care and child welfare services, youth after school and development programs, and senior centers and supportive services for older adults – services needed to support those struggling during this economic downturn.

“When New Yorkers are struggling and demand for services is rising, it is absolutely the wrong time to cut human service programs. The Mayor and City Council must find ways to fund child care, children's safety, health, and mental health services, after school programs, senior centers, and other services that create a support system for low and moderate income families and keep communities healthy and safe. These prudent investments in our social infrastructure will benefit all residents of our City,” said Nancy Wackstein, Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses.

Stephanie Gendell, Associate Executive Director of Citizens' Committee for Children, addressed the need for child welfare services funding: "Our City already knows the terrible tragedies that can happen when ACS and its provider agencies do not have the resources needed to keep children safe and families together," she said. "The Mayor and City Council must adopt a budget that restores funding to ACS, preventive service providers, and foster care agencies because even in difficult budget times, child safety must never be compromised."

In addition to child welfare services, the City's child care system, which prepares young children for school and enables working parents to maintain employment, is slated to lose over 1,000 child care slots and 3,000 child care vouchers, in addition to millions in cuts to existing early childhood education programs such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start.

“Parents are scrambling to find safe, affordable care and education for their young children while the City is reducing the number of available child care slots and cutting funds for early childhood programs. We owe it to the youngest New Yorkers to stop these cuts,” said Nina Piros, Director of Early Childhood Programs at University Settlement Society.

Youth development and after school programs also face an uncertain future, with over \$42 million in proposed cuts in the FY2010 budget, on top of millions in cuts already sustained this fiscal year. One particularly harmful cut is the complete elimination of a successful after school funding stream, Out of School Time Option II, which funds flexible programs for underserved youth and supports 10,750 after school program slots across the City.

“After school programs provide youth and teens with key educational, social, and extracurricular opportunities as well as a safe place to go after school hours,” explained Amarilis Perez, Director of the Edgies Teen Center at Educational Alliance. “Now, more than ever, these programs are essential for the safety and success of our young people.”

“Flexible programs for youth, such as dropout prevention initiatives, must be funded to ensure the success of young people in New York City,” added Jim Marley, Assistant Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services. “Chipping away at these programs compromises their quality and ability to serve those in need of services.”

Beacon programs – school based community centers which provide children, youth, and adults with education enrichment, recreation programs, and social services in an integrated setting – have already felt the impact of budget cuts. “Trips have been cancelled, we don’t have any money for dance, and we can’t afford supplies for some of our projects,” said Natalie, a youth participant in the Cypress Hills Beacon program. “We are all very worried. We hope our programs can continue – they are very important to us.”

Aging services advocates and providers are equally concerned about cuts to senior centers and supportive services. The FY2010 budget cut over \$7 million for aging services traditionally allocated by Borough Presidents and included a 5% cut to all senior center budgets as well as the elimination of the weekend meal.

“Senior centers and supportive programs are critical in keeping older New Yorkers healthy, active, and engaged. This is not the time to cut back on critical support systems and sources of food for seniors, especially since these programs save the City money by preventing premature institutionalization,” said Yehudit Moch of Hudson Guild’s Adult Services program.

“The senior center is like a second home to me. I don’t know what I would do without it,” declared Katherine Andrade, a participant in the Hudson Guild senior center. “City leaders need to be sensitive to the needs of the thousands of seniors who are relying on their support during this economic crisis.”

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This event was sponsored by: Citizens’ Committee for Children, Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, Commission on the Public’s Health System, Council of Senior Centers and Services, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, Educational Alliance, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Goddard Riverside Community Center, Institute for Student Achievement, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, New York City Youth Alliance, New York Junior Tennis League, Partnership for Afterschool Education, Queens Community House, Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation, The Children's Aid Society, The Dryfoos Group, UJA-Federation of New York, and United Neighborhood Houses.