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**Testimony before the Aging Committee
of the New York City Council**

Maria Baez, Chair

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Good morning, my name is Jessica Walker and I am a Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is the federation of 36 settlement houses benefiting 500,000 participants—from infants to adults to senior citizens—through educational programs, employment assistance, human services, and cultural activities at 350 sites throughout New York City. Settlement houses provide a range of services to aging adults and their families, including the operation of 22 senior centers and 6 NORCs around the metropolitan area. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about the need for Intro. No. 410.

Last November, UNH in conjunction with The Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City, Inc. initiated a campaign to increase utilization of the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption Program (SCRIE). As you know, the SCRIE program has had much success in lessening the burdensome impact of the rising cost of living on seniors. Unfortunately, the program is still greatly underutilized; recent findings show that less than half of eligible households appear to be benefiting from it. As such, we convened key advocates from the City's government, corporate, religious, and nonprofit sectors to share ideas about enrolling more eligible seniors in the SCRIE program. We were pleased that the Counsel to this Committee, Ms. Chereé A. Buggs, was able to actively participate in that imperative undertaking. In the beginning, the dialogue focused solely on ways that we could increase utilization, but one overwhelming concern that emerged was the current protocol for redetermining a senior's rent.

Under current law, when there is a permanent decrease in household income that is greater than 20% of the total household income, a SCRIE recipient may apply for redetermination of the amount of their SCRIE benefit. The City's Department for the Aging (DFTA) receives approximately 2000 SCRIE redetermination applications per year, which is simply a written request accompanied by proof of the permanent loss of income. Typically, these requests come as a result of retirement, the death of a spouse, or the permanent move of one spouse to a nursing home. Unfortunately, current law requires that such redetermination must be applied for upon renewal of their SCRIE benefit, or one year after issuance of the renewal of their SCRIE benefit.

The SCRIE program was designed to help low-income elderly residents afford housing as their income tapers off and it has helped immensely. However, having to wait up to a year for redetermination is a significant hardship. According to a recent study by the Public Advocate, 65% of senior center participants in New York City feel that they are either "just getting by" or simply "can't make ends meet." The absence of adequate benefits such as SCRIE, even for a few months, can be devastating for this population.

This bill would eliminate the confusion and delay that current law creates and permit SCRIE beneficiaries to apply for, and receive, redetermination right away, when it is needed most. As such, we urge you to sign this vital bill into law.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we stand ready to work with you to bring about these necessary improvements. Thank you.