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**Testimony presented by Nancy Wackstein
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**Before the New York City Council Youth Services Committee
Lew Fidler, Chair**

Hearing on the Out-of-School Time Request for Proposals

January 20, 2005

Good afternoon Honorable Chair Lew Fidler, and members of the Committee. My name is Nancy Wackstein, and I am the Executive Director of 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 settlement houses include: early childhood education, after-school programs, teen centers, English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, GED classes, job training, tutoring, recreation, meals and supportive services for the elderly, mental health counseling, drug prevention, and art, music and drama programs.

For the past year and a half, I was a member of the OST leadership team and devoted many hours to help the City develop a plan in which we could take pride. Several of UNH's member agencies, and many of our child care and youth services colleagues participated in this process as well, with the City. I want to acknowledge and thank the City for their tireless efforts to engage the funder, provider and advocacy communities in these planning efforts. Indeed, I believe the OST planning process was successful in bringing together the many partners who shape and fund the creative, learning and leadership development programs for our City's young people. We all learned a great deal about each other's interests and priorities. Our mutual commitment to support vibrant youth programming has been heightened and focused.

Drawing on my personal experience running settlement house programs as well as the experience of UNH's 35 member agencies, I believed and hoped that the spotlight of this comprehensive planning effort would help identify the resources to create an extraordinary OST system in New York City. While the recently released OST RFP articulates a laudable vision and a set of goals which characterize the quality OST system we all desire, I regret that the system remains insufficiently resourced. This RFP consolidates three existing funding streams that currently support childcare and afterschool programs and eliminates \$27.5 million for these services. Sadly, the dream of a high quality and widely accessible service system is, once again, to be deferred.

Our membership has expressed concerns about the recently released RFP. I am here today to discuss some of these concerns, in the hope that we can still realize an OST system that affords access, flexibility, and quality to our City's youth and families.

1) The OST RFP discourages community center programming.

Community based organizations (CBOs) like settlement houses have their own facilities that allow them to offer programs in a variety of educational and cultural venues, including dance studios, art centers, computer learning labs, pools and other quality spaces that greatly enhance a young person’s talents and abilities. We believe that the OST initiative should provide every possible incentive for CBOs to help young people gain access to these special resources.

- Under Option I, providers of school based programming greatly benefit from the Department of Education’s (DOE) agreement to pay for opening fees, security costs and food at school sites. We applaud DYCD’s efforts to negotiate these savings for the CBOs who run programs in schools, including many UNH member agencies. But in fact, while this agreement with DOE provides an incentive to operate programs in schools, it creates a disincentive for CBOs to continue center-based programming. For center-based programs, facility and food costs will have to be paid for within the contract bottom line, putting additional financial pressure on already stretched program budgets.
- Public schools and NYCHA facilities are invited to show how their facilities can be ADA compliant through site-specific accommodations. Community center sites are not granted the same opportunity in this RFP.

We believe that this represents an unwelcome philosophical and operational shift in City policy and penalizes programs operated in community centers and other non-school sites. Whether this financial bias was intended or not, the result of this RFP will be to shift resources away from center-based programs. We strongly believe this will be a great loss to our City’s families and children who rely on these flexible and welcoming programs in their communities.

Recommendation:

- **Allow for a higher and more flexible cost per participant rate to cover operating costs for community center based programs;**
- **Allow center-based programs to provide evidence that appropriate ADA accommodations have been made in their buildings.**

2) The OST RFP eliminates twenty five percent of city funds for afterschool programs compared to this current fiscal year.

Funding Streams	FY '05 level	Proposed Cut	RFP funding level
DYCD – YDDP Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention Program	\$22 million	\$10 million	\$12 million
DYCD – TASC The After-School Corporation	\$10.5 million	\$2.5 million	\$8 million
ACS – SACC School Age Child Care	\$59 million	\$15 million	\$44 million
Total	\$91.5 million	\$27.5 million	\$64 million

With a reduction of \$27.5 million in funding and based on the cost structure outlined in this RFP, we believe at least 20,000 fewer young people will be served.

Recommendation: At a minimum, the Mayor should permanently restore OST funding to the level in this current fiscal year. The larger goal is to add \$100 million over three years to allow service levels to meet the growing need and demand.

3) Eliminating School Age Child Care funding at ACS will destabilize the ACS child care system.

During early discussions, the administration clearly stated that shifting school-age child care programs from ACS to DYCD would not result in major disruption to the current child care system. To date, little information has been shared with providers or families about the details of this transition. For example:

- How will funding in consolidated child care contracts (early childhood and school age) be separated?
- How and when will families with children in current ACS school age child care programs be informed of pending changes? This change will certainly present a challenge, if not a real hardship, for working families who have carefully managed their child care arrangements.
- School age child care funds that had been allocated in FY '05 to maintain service levels in ACS programs have not been baselined for FY '06. Are programs therefore likely to be eliminated or service gaps created for the City's most needy families?
- ACS funded programs employ unionized staff. When these programs are eliminated, this already low-paid workforce will lose union wages and benefits. Even if re-hired under an OST contract, budget levels will not allow providers to compensate staff at union rates.

Recommendation: Do not transfer school age child care funds until there is a comprehensive plan to ensure stability for ACS pre-school child care programs and continued access for all ACS families currently being served.

4) The timing of the OST awards, with a September 1, 2005 start date, will be too late for parents to make informed decisions about their child care and afterschool arrangements.

We are greatly concerned that the notification of awards, due in July 2005, will be too late for parents to make informed decisions about their child care and afterschool arrangements. We believe it is quite possible that by the start of the new school year in September '05 parents will be without appropriate coverage for their children. Consider the following:

- Parents will first need to be notified that the current school age child care system and currently funded afterschool youth programs are changing. After learning about the changes, parents would need to find out whether their current child care and afterschool service providers have applied for funding for a new program.
- Current ACS funded school age child care providers may choose not to apply for or win an award in the current RFP process.
- Current DYCD funded afterschool youth services providers may choose not to apply for or win an award in the current RFP process.
- If providers do win an award, they may alter the duration and location of their services. (Providers have the option to move their programs to a school location as well as decide to operate a school-year only program)

Recommendation: We urge the City to extend the date for implementing this RFP until there is a comprehensive plan and adequate timeline to provide parents with information and options for their child care and afterschool needs.

5) Unlike School Age Child Care programs under ACS, DYCD prohibits fees for its programs. This means a funding cut for many providers that will have a significant impact on their already reduced program budgets.

Currently, school age child care programs leverage public funding with private fees. This funding is essential in helping programs pay for costs not covered by city contracts and for providing the enriched activities and offerings that distinguish quality programs. Fees also allow programs to operate year round by extending afterschool into full day summer camps. Without parent fees, summer camps will have to reduce the number of children served.

Recommendation: Work with the State to allow providers to implement a sliding fee scale for programs.

6) The OST RFP short-changes community needs in Option I by calculating and allocating funding levels by school region rather than community districts.

As we noted in our response to the OST concept paper, we believe that funding levels ought to be calculated by community district need. Assessing need at the very large DOE Region level and not by neighborhood dilutes and masks the needs of underserved populations in particular neighborhoods. Given that there are several community districts within each DOE Region, the availability of services in many needy communities may actually be reduced because of this RFP. In addition, since DOE Regions are not linked to any system of community governance or accountability, individual residents and neighborhood planners will have no way to provide feedback on local youth services or issues related to them.

Several community-based programs currently serve the children of the workers in their neighborhood in addition to the children of neighborhood residents. For example, hospital and domestic workers on the Upper East Side often request and prefer that their children be enrolled in afterschool programs near where they work, rather than where they live. The convenience of the commute and long work hours makes this type of access more advantageous for these parents and their children. A program that successfully serves non-residents – either the children of workers or children who attend parochial schools in a neighborhood different from their home district – will find it difficult to win funding under this RFP based on Regions.

Recommendation: Calculate the funding for Option I based on the 59 community districts rather than the 10 DOE Regions. There would then be specific allocations and competition pools by community district.

7) The OST RFP does not meet the needs of older youth.

Only 10 percent of the funding in Option I is dedicated for high school students in each Region. Currently, DYCD funds a range of comprehensive programming that integrates college and career counseling, college prep, leadership development and vocational development. These comprehensive services will no longer fit under the new funding model that only allows for 108 hours (36 weeks at 3 hours a week) of programming annually. These comprehensive programs

also help to connect disengaged youth back to the school system. It will be tragic to lose these important and successful services at the very time that the Mayor has announced his interest in expanding programs and services for disconnected youth and linking them to workforce participation.

Recommendation: Increase the amount of funding included in the RFP for programs for older youth.

We look forward to working with you to achieve the changes that will allow our member agencies to continue to provide opportunities and hope for thousands of New York City children.

Thank you for your time.