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**Testimony before the Youth Services Committee &  
the Economic Development Committee  
of the New York City Council**

**Lewis Fidler, Chair, Youth Services Committee  
James Sanders, Chair, Economic Development Committee**

**Hearing on the Workforce Investment Act**

**September 15, 2003**

Good afternoon, Chairman Fidler, Chairman Sanders, members of both committees, my name is Susan Stampler, and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). As you may know, UNH is the federation of 36 settlement houses that benefits half a million New Yorkers—from youth to adults to seniors—with educational programs, employment assistance, human services, and cultural activities at 350 locations throughout New York City. Specifically, our member settlement houses offer after-school programs, teen employment and job training, educational and cultural activities, and a host of other opportunities to some 50,000 youth throughout New York City. Settlement houses run youth vocational programs partnering with both private foundations and government. The federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding enables several settlements to incorporate a youth employment focus into many of their existing youth development programs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the positive impact of WIA.

Settlement houses have an historic commitment in providing their communities with employment training and youth development programs. Today, the WIA in-school youth programs successfully bridge both these settlement house priorities, and include elements designed to better prepare youth for the job market. Programs emphasize work readiness skills (e.g. self assessment, job search, job readiness), internships, and mentoring in addition to important components of youth development – academic achievement, college preparedness, leadership development, and positive peer-to-peer experiences. Taken together, the elements of WIA in-school youth programs view youth in a holistic manner while preparing them for work. It also agrees with a growing body of research evidence and experience that incorporating youth development principles into youth employment programs leads to more positive results for young people, helping them develop basic workforce competencies, getting and keeping jobs and continuing their education.<sup>1</sup>

Youth employment programs are desperately needed in today's economy. Teen unemployment in New York City is almost double the national average, with one out of every three teenagers

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Zuckerman. "The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same." National Youth Employment Coalition.

aged 16-19 unemployed.<sup>2</sup> According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, from the beginning of the national recession in March of 2001, through July 2003, New York State lost 265,000 jobs, a 3.1% decline. New York's decline was over one-and-a-half times the national 2.0% rate of job loss during this period. Such a complex and difficult economy underscores the importance of preparing youth for employment and ensuring that they have the needed skills to succeed: basic verbal, written, math, and computer skills; and work readiness skills.

Entering the third year of the WIA-in-school contracts, our settlements are increasingly seeing the effectiveness of this program, and the positive impact it is having on the youth they serve. For example, youth are attaining improved grades; are more confident and better public speakers; can write and update a resume; and have positive internship experiences that prepare them for what a job is like. These paid internships also offer needed income for the low-income families of these youth. As the WIA in-school youth program is year round and also requires follow-up services for youth that exit the program, it allows for better tracking and monitoring of the progress of these young people. Issues that may impede their progress (e.g. failing grades; poor school attendance; difficulty obtaining a job) can be pinpointed and addressed more quickly.

With the growing success of this program, it is devastating for contractors to have to cut their spending by 45% in the final year of their contract. These programs will now serve fewer youth, and those youth that remain in programs are likely to have fewer services available to them. While we remain baffled at the need for the WIA in-school contractors to take a 45% cut in the program's third year of operation, we are also troubled by the way contractors first learned about these cuts. According to some of our settlement houses, contractors were aware of a potential 20-25% cut in April 2003. However, it was not until a mid-August meeting with DYCD, that contractors were informed that the actual cut would be 45%, effective September 1, 2003, less than one month before the cut was to take place! Contractors were told that an individual meeting and a letter would be arranged to discuss the cuts further. Instead, contractors received a phone call in late August 2003 informing them of the reduced number of youth they were expected to serve. As of last week, DYCD still had not sent out written communication to confirm these cuts. We find this approach to what is supposed to be a partnership between the public and the non-profit sectors to be unacceptable and disrespectful.

To explain what in-school WIA funded programs do, we have invited three settlement houses to join us: Florence Li-Maldonado from Chinese-American Planning Council; Domenic Andreassi from Moshulu Montefiore Community Center; and Gary Spencer, a youth participant from Grand Street Settlement, will briefly describe their program work and the impact these cuts will have on their community.

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Ostreicher, "Summertime Unemployment." Gotham Gazette – <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/socialservices/20030827/15/504>