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**Testimony presented by Nancy Wackstein
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**Before the New York City Council Commission
on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)**

**David Jones, Co-Chair
Arthur Levine, Co-Chair**

**Hearing IV: Pre-K and After-school
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Good afternoon. 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 umbrella organization for 35 settlement houses 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 the 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.

I am here today to applaud the Court of Appeals decision on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit that New York City schools must receive the funding necessary to meet the constitutional mandate to provide all New York City students the opportunity for a sound basic education. Indeed, the report and recommendations delivered last week by the Court appointed judicial referees to increase New York City's school operating aid to \$5.63 billion a year by FY 2008-09 is welcome news. And as the City Council's Commission on CFE hears testimony on how our city can implement a plan to best help our school children, I want to propose that a portion of these funds are used for youth development and Out of School Time (OST) activities.

As we know, not all learning takes place in the classroom, during the school day. In fact our network of settlement houses, several of which have been around since the turn of the last century, understand the need to provide our city's young people with a range of OST activities that augment the school day and enhance learning. These programs reach more than 70,000 youth and offer leadership and social skill building, visual and performing arts activities, tutoring, homework help and college preparation, job readiness skills, internships, sports and recreational programs and entrée to New York City's cultural institutions.

New York City has a vast and vibrant community based organization (CBO) infrastructure that currently provides these services. OST programs operated by our members in their community centers, NYCHA facilities, and in schools, add to the richness of NYC's neighborhoods and quality of life. They help to anchor neighborhoods, provide continuity of care, build relationships for multiple generations, and contribute to their health and vitality.

We believe that there is an important role for after-school programs to motivate and help to prepare our young people for academic success, workforce success, and social and civic participation.

Learning occurs in a variety of settings, and not just between the hours of 9am to 3pm. After-school is a time where learning occurs outside of the classroom, allowing young people to explore additional interests and aspects of their creativity. For example:

- As part of a theme-based curriculum in a Manhattan settlement house, young people participate in a comprehensive approach to learning about various cultures and traditions. For example, when studying the cultural history of Indonesian society, young people learn traditional dances, explore the art of batik fabric making and prepare creative writing pieces.
- One settlement house runs a community based program teaching conflict resolution and problem solving skills to first through sixth grade students. This program is designed to teach transferable skills that children can use in a school context to reduce disruptions in a classroom, thereby allowing for more focused learning time. Young people learn these techniques and see them as an alternative to resolving conflicts through verbal or physical altercations, both in school and out of school.
- In a drama program operated by a settlement house, young people study theater and read and produce plays. Building the scenery and sets requires young people to utilize an array of math skills.
- A Queens settlement house focuses on helping young people with their communication skills and relationships with their peers. Local schools understand that these programs contribute to the overall improvement in behavior and academic success for these young people.
- To meet the needs of working parents wanting homework assistance, a Manhattan settlement house runs a program designed to motivate young people through a homework star chart. The goal for all 200 children enrolled in this program is to complete at least one subject during the allotted session, three times per week. Students have been enthusiastic about finishing, and they now compete with each other and more importantly themselves, for the most checks per week. There were fewer than 20 students who did not reach this goal. Staff can assist with homework and young people compete to have all of their assignments completed.
- A Bronx settlement house runs a jobs skills/life skills program where high school students are placed at a job site and learn how to write a resume, prepare for a job interview, complete a job application, and work cooperatively with others.
- A Brooklyn settlement house runs a leadership program teaching teens how to facilitate meetings and achieve their outcomes. The staff emphasize a set of skills that include agenda setting, time management and note taking.

- One Bronx settlement house runs an after-school program for children ages 5 through 12. Grouped according to age, this program is designed to help children love reading. Small groups meet in non-classroom settings, allowing children to recline or relax while reading. Children are allowed to take home the book being discussed by their group. Staff read aloud to every age group while encouraging the younger children to create related art projects. The older youth have discussion groups and when possible, see the movie version of the books they just read. This program aims to build readers who are critical thinkers.

These successful after-school programs see young people holistically, and provide the environment and stimulation they need to develop into a well-rounded individual. **And by promoting positive youth and child development, young people increase their cognitive capacities and improve their chances for school--and life--success.** Research on quality after-school programs consistently cite the following key program characteristics:

- a. There are sufficient well trained and compensated staff;
- b. Staff leadership is aware of child and youth development stages;
- c. There are opportunities for peer support and interaction as well as positive interactions between staff and participants;
- d. Youth play a substantial role in program development, leadership and decision-making;
- e. Program content is tailored to meet the needs and interests of participants and varied enough to allow participant choice;
- f. Programs respect the diversity of their participants;
- g. Programs are operated in safe, accessible, attractive space and facilities.

In today's society, where working parents are finding it more difficult to make ends meet, and most adults must work, after-school programs are an integral support for family stability, child safety, youth and child development, and community building.

If after-school programs are to continue this positive work, they need adequate resources. Programs must be able to hire qualified staff with backgrounds in education and child development. Additionally, there are segments of the youth population where equitable access to youth programs must be ensured. According to a 2003 report by California Tomorrow entitled "Pursuing the Promise: Addressing Equity, Access, and Diversity in After School and Youth Programs," which looked at programs nationally, the segments of the youth population where equitable access needs to be ensured are:

- Low-income youth
- Youth of color
- English language learners and immigrant youth
- Disabled youth
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth

Community-based OST programs are successful at providing innovative and engaging programming for these groups in a way that schools are not. We need adequate resources and careful planning to expand after-school programs to all New York City youth. CFE funds are an important source of funding as well as a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our young people. We urge our City's leaders, as they contemplate the use of these funds, to carefully balance academic enrichment activities with youth development programs and:

1. Invest \$100 million to support and expand OST programs throughout every community.
2. Ensure that the OST system provides a variety of quality program models in a variety of settings, in order to meet the diverse needs of our City's working families.
3. Coordinate resources between the Department for Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the Department of Education for community groups to expand youth development and OST activities both in community centers and in school buildings. Neither agency can afford to view young people only during a particular set of hours in the day.

We encourage the City Council to produce a strong plan that builds on the current settlement house model programs and continues to promote positive youth development and learning. We look forward to continuing to work with you to enrich the lives of our young people.

Thank you.