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TESTIMONY ON:
Neighborhood NORC'S

Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature

Human Services Budget Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2017-18

Honorable Catharine M. Young, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
Honorable Herman D. Farrell, Jr., Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

Honorable Sue Serino, Chair Senate Committee on Aging
Honorable Donna Lupardo, Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

Honorable Tony Avella, Chair, Senate Committee on Children & Families
Honorable Ellen Jaffee, Chair, Assembly Committee on Children & Families

Honorable James Tedisco, Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services
Honorable Andrew Hevesi, Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

Submitted by:

CARMEN L. PEREZ
DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBORHOOD NORC PROGRAM
COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE, INC.

February 10, 2017

My name is Carmen Perez, Director of the Neighborhood NORC Program at the Cooper Square Committee. The Cooper Square Committee is a tenants' rights organization in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Cooper Square Committee's mission is to work with area residents to contribute to the preservation and development of affordable, environmentally healthy and community/cultural spaces so that the Cooper Square area remains racially, economically and culturally diverse. Through this aim we have seen our elder population grow and thus recognized the needs of our East Village aging community by developing and shaping a program by their own design. Through a partnership among low and moderate income residents, housing management companies, and health care and social service providers, facilitated by Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs (N/NORCs) support older residents and enable them to age in place, thrive in their communities, and delay and avoid hospitalization or nursing home placement. By providing these vital programs and resources aging New Yorkers from low to middle income can be assured of not having to go out of their way to continue to enjoy their independence.

N/NORCs provide programs and services that support a group that might otherwise fall through the cracks. N/NORCs provide case management, socialization programs, transportation and shopping assistance, as well as basic health services that allow seniors to remain in their homes, greatly improving their quality of life.

In the FY 2016-2017 Enacted Budget, significant legislative changes were made to the NORC program, including expanding NORC definitions to include rural NORCs and allowing NORCs to receive up to \$200,000 and neighborhood NORCs to receive no less than \$60,000 to support programming. The New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) has released a Request for Applications (RFA) for N/NORCS that reflect the statutory changes, but only plans to fund 12 classic NORCs and 12 neighborhood NORCs. There are currently 16 classic NORCs and 13 neighborhood NORCs supported by NYSOFA.

Without any changes, five existing NORC programs will be forced to close. Governor Cuomo's FY 2017-2018 Executive Budget allocates \$2,027,500 for NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities) and \$2,027,500 for Neighborhood NORCs (NNORCs). This eliminates the additional \$350,000 for NORCs and \$350,000 for Neighborhood NORCs that was included in the FY 2016-2017 Enacted Budget.

Furthermore, the RFA and the current budget allocation does not allow for expansion of the program, despite the fact that the legislation was updated last year with expansion in mind. Additional funding is vital to ensure that current NORCs can continue to provide services, particularly health care management services, and to grow the program to underserved areas with increasing aging populations. Moreover, the formulary needs to be reviewed so that current exceptions are taken on a case-by-case basis. One cookie cutter approach does not fit all.

Restoring \$700,000 from FY16-17 and investing an additional \$5.25 million in the N/NORC program (split evenly between the classic NORC and neighborhood NORC programs) will preserve the existing 29 NYSOFA-funded NORCs, and will allow for the creation of about 21 new NORCs across the State.

In closing, it's worth noting that making stronger NORCs and N/NORC's program is in the best interest of all aging New Yorkers. It maintains viability while preserving the integrity of the community. With that being said further information and study into aging communities needs to be reassessed across the state regarding NYSOFA funds. The Cooper Square Committee N/NORC program is in agreement with the rest of the general NORC communities to have programs in place that run efficiently and sufficiently for a healthy perspective for our seniors.

Thank you.