

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

Joint Legislative Public Hearings
2015/16 Executive Budget Proposal

HUMAN SERVICES
February 4, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Edie Mesick and I am the State Government Relations Executive at UJA-Federation of New York. UJA-Federation of New York is a Jewish philanthropy whose mission includes helping people in need. We support a network of 100 nonprofit agencies that provide a range of human services in NYC, Westchester and Long Island.

New York State has a long history of commitment to the poor and most vulnerable persons in our population, a commitment based not only on constitutional obligation, but also on your own deep personal moral fortitude.

When our state experienced the recent deep economic recession, difficult decisions were made to limit funding for essential programs delivered by community based providers. Today, as the economy recovers and the state has an unprecedented opportunity to allocate \$5.1 billion in one-time settlement dollars, we believe that the state must turn its attention to investing in the nonprofit infrastructure and support for crucial services. Details are provided below.

Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Fund

The establishment of a New York State nonprofit infrastructure fund will provide a critical lifeline to the nonprofit provider community and to the many New Yorkers we serve, and would be entirely consistent with a State effort to make smart, targeted investments in the public service infrastructure. It is in the State's interest to have a healthy, stable nonprofit sector capable of delivering high-quality, efficient, and effective services to its residents. The Governor has proposed an excellent start to meeting this need with the proposed \$50 million Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program which would fund projects for technology upgrades (especially needed for health information technology connections), physical renovations for direct program services (including accessibility renovations), and modifications to provide for sustainable, energy efficient spaces that would result in overall energy and cost savings.

We urge your support of the Governor's proposal. In addition, since we know that the demand from the human services sector for these purposes will exceed \$500 million, we strongly urge that additional funding for the Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Fund be provided, allocated from the one-shot New York State \$5.1 billion settlement dollars. This additional funding is particularly important in light of potential legal limitations on the use of bonded dollars (possibly requiring building ownership or bonded funds can't be used).

COLA (Cost of Living Adjustments)

The cost of providing quality health and human services to the poor and needy are increasing every year and the demands on those agencies that care for our most vulnerable populations are growing. We must ensure that the nonprofit sector can retain quality workers through state funding annual COLA increases for nonprofit health and human service agencies. We commend the Governor and the legislature for the commitment to provide a 2% COLA for direct service providers in the last fiscal year, and to expand it to include additional clinical staff, as of April 1, with the funding in this budget. However, funding the full COLA for all human services continues to be an essential priority. Language for the full COLA funding exists in state statute and we strongly urge that a \$354 million investment in the human services nonprofit sector COLA funding be included in the final SFY 2015/16 budget.

NORC/NNORCs

NORC -Naturally Occurring Retirement Community / NNORC - Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. NORC/NNORCs help seniors to age in place, by organizing their communities, in partnership with professional service organizations, to create social and service supports that help enable them to remain living in their own homes, even as they grow older and frailer. NORCs are in housing that has common ownership-co-ops, a major landlord, or a housing authority, characteristically located in urban centers. Neighborhood NORCs are more typically located in suburban communities, with unaffiliated housing characterized by single and two family homes or low-rise, apartment buildings. New York State provides just over \$2 million annually each for the two programs, but due the increase in demand as well as the cost saving effects of these programs we request a \$1 million increase for each program.

Consideration of Creation of an Office of Community Living

UJA-Federation, as an organization with a deep commitment and interest in community based services to seniors and to persons with disabilities, is intrigued by the Executive proposal to seek public input about the creation of an office of community living with the goal of providing improvements in service delivery and improved program outcomes that would result from the expansion of community living integration services for older adults and persons of all ages with disabilities.

We recognize that this concept reflects an approach recently established at the federal level, but which has not yet had practical implementation. We are very pleased to see that the Governor's proposal is to take the time needed to study the question of whether this type of office would have value in NYS, and to open this conversation to all affected stakeholders, in a process to be led NYSOFA. We look forward to developing our recommendations through this process, and urge your careful scrutiny and attention to this effort.

SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program)

UJA-Federation recognizes the commitment in the Executive budget to keep pace with minimum wage increases by the \$2.5 million increase in funding for SYEP in the proposed budget. However there continues to be huge unmet demand: in each of the

past five years, 2 out of 3 applicants have been turned away from the program. We urge that funding for SYEP be increased by \$19.31 million (including the minimum wage increase), for a total investment of \$49.31 million, allowing for 10,000 additional youth to participate.

Afterschool

Community-based human service agencies have an excellent track record in providing quality afterschool programs, but state funding has been substantially reduced in recent years, including a \$500,000 cut in the proposed budget. A substantial increase in funding would support existing program service levels as well as the several hundred viable new applications for competitive afterschool grants which could not begin services due to insufficient funding levels. UJA-Federation supports an investment of at least \$178.5 million in new funds for afterschool statewide.

UPK

Many of the nonpublic schools and UJA-Federation of NY network agencies provide pre-kindergarten to children of all backgrounds. We note that it is important that the State continue to ensure the availability of funding for half-day programs and a 5-hour program so that providers have the flexibility to structure a program to best meet their community's needs. Also, it is essential that the state ensure that nonpublic schools and CBOs continue to have a right to apply directly to the state for funding if they are turned down for inclusion in their local school district's application. In addition, UJA-Federation requests that at least \$150 million be added to the Statewide UPK program to provide upfront funding for districts outside New York City and to fully support NYC's plan to reach universal access.

Safe Harbor Funding

The Safe Harbor Act was established to address the widespread sexual exploitation and commercial trafficking of thousands of children occurring in New York State. This program was partially funded at \$3 million in SFY 14/15, but the Executive budget did not appropriate any funds for this important program. In conjunction with a broad coalition, UJA supports full funding of the Safe Harbor Act.

Job Readiness

Funding for essential job readiness / training programs must be provided in the final State budget, including **Wage Subsidy Program** and the **Career Pathways Program**. Both programs have been severely underfunded in recent years, funded at \$950,000 in recent years (down from a \$14 million annual investment). These programs were again zeroed out in the Governor's proposed budget; UJA-Federation strongly supports a significant increase in funding in the 2015/16 budget for these proven programs.

Medical-Legal Partnerships

In 2011, New York became the first state to establish legislation that provides state designation of Health Related Legal Services Programs. These medical legal partnership programs provide free legal services onsite at health care facilities, addressing the needs of low-income New Yorkers with serious or chronic illnesses.

Health Related Legal Services Programs reduce health care costs because they help low-income individuals with chronic and serious illness resolve the myriad legal problems that can dramatically affect their health outcomes, including issues with housing, insurance, income supports, immigration, and consumer debt. These programs further benefit their clients by training health care professionals to recognize legal issues that may negatively affect medical outcomes.

There are currently Health Related Legal Services Programs in 67 medical sites across NYS provided by 19 human service agency law partners. In SFY 2015/16, we are asking the legislature to establish a new \$2 million revenue resource to support and expand these programs.

HIT EHR Connectivity for Community Services

NYS recently invested in an initiative to unify access to all electronic health records through the SHIN-NY. It is essential that the State now take the next step and provide an ongoing funding mechanism to pay for the staff training, software and technology infrastructure for community based health and social service provider agencies to establish or upgrade their electronic health information technology systems in order to insure connectivity and interoperability and maximize service coordination throughout the system, to assure that Medicaid and all clients receive the best quality of care and the provision of the most appropriate and least costly services.

Anti-Hunger

Because we recognize the devastating effects of hunger, UJA-Federation of New York has partnered with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies in a *Feeding Our Neighbor* campaign, jointly committing to delivering 1 million meals to feed the hungry. UJA-Federation is in support of the Governor's plans to bolster funding for the state's emergency food system. We also support the Executive's efforts to increase access to the federally funded, underutilized child nutrition programs, including the CACFP, Summer Food and school meals programs.

Conclusion

UJA-Federation believes that it is essential that this nation and our great State of New York continue to serve needy and vulnerable people. We respectfully urge your consideration and support of the programs discussed in this testimony.