



**Testimony of YWCAs of New York State
Presented by Christine Sadowski
Joint Legislative Hearing on Human Services (February 6, 2018)**

YWCAs of New York State

Binghamton/Broome County

Brooklyn

Cortland

Elmira & Twin Tiers

Greater Capital Region

Jamestown

Niagara Frontier

Northeastern New York

Orange County

Queens

Rochester & Monroe County

Syracuse & Onondaga
County

Ulster County

Western New York

White Plains & Central
Westchester

Yonkers

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of 16 YWCAs across New York State.

The YWCA, for over 150 years, has supported marginalized women and girls, particularly women and girls of color, in their pursuit of productive and healthy lives. The mission of YWCAs is to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all. To fulfill this mission, YWCAs throughout New York State provide various services ranging from safe, affordable housing to childcare, teen services and immigrant supports. Today I want to focus on the work YWCAs do to help women-headed households achieve economic self-sufficiency.

YWCAs are working to close the gender wage gap at all levels of employment in New York State

Women-headed households are the poorest of the poor - at the bottom of every economic index, in every country on the planet. Gender wage gap inequities prevail across the pay spectrum, even women with advanced degrees make less money than their male counterparts. For women at lower pay scales, these unjust discrepancies result in ongoing financial crises for single moms. YWCAs are the community agencies on the front line of this economic battle, and are most often the loudest advocates ensuring that community leaders, elected officials and even the business community, understand the very real consequences of the very real gender wage gap.

We appreciate that Governor Cuomo included in his budget proposal \$175 million for workforce investments that will focus efforts to improve the economic security of women. YWCAs work every day to help New York women become economically self-sufficient and we know that in order to be successful, workforce development programs need to address the specific challenges directly related to employment. However, a dedicated funding stream currently does not exist to help pay for the wrap-around services or support the necessary post-employment case management that is essential for this population to truly improve the economic security of her household. Therefore, we would request that a portion of these funds be dedicated to services that support a women's economic empowerment program – targeted workforce development accompanied by critical wrap-around services women need to move toward economic self-sufficiency.

YWCAs fill a critical gap in traditional workforce services

Many who receive services from the YWCAs face multiple barriers directly related to employment and self-sufficiency including dealing with other immediate and significant challenges. For example, many of the women who utilize the services of YWCAs have struggled with homelessness, prison, chronic mental illness, substance abuse (sometimes combined with mental health issues), domestic violence, and significant health and/or development disabilities. Substantial time and attention is required to first stabilize the lives of these women before they can be ready for the demands of work. YWCAs, nonetheless, recognize that with appropriate interventions, these women can and do overcome these barriers and become job ready. With effective resources and support, they can even reach economic self-sufficiency.

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YWCA's, through their long-standing and unique position in the communities they serve, recognize that the multiple, immediate needs of their clients hinder successful access and completion of traditional workforce preparation programs. By offering their own unique job opportunities while also addressing the immediate needs of their clients, YWCA's have developed ways to overcome the gaps in traditional workforce development models. The services YWCA's provide go beyond what are traditionally considered "workforce engagement / workforce development" programs.

YWCA's provide workforce development with wrap-around services because they know how critical it is to address multiple, immediate, often crisis-driven needs of women and their families as they gain job readiness skills necessary to become financially self-sufficient. Again, thank you for this opportunity to present today.