



TESTIMONY

New York State Legislature
Human Services Committee
2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
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Submitted by:
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Good morning and thank you Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein, and Senator Liz Krueger for this opportunity today to speak about the human services sector. I also want to thank the committee chairs and the New York State legislature Committee members on Human Services.

My name is Gabriela Andrade, and I am the Policy and Organizing Strategist at the Human Services Council (HSC), a membership organization representing over 170 human services providers in New York City. HSC serves our membership as a coordinating body, advocate, and intermediary between the human services sector and government. We take on this work so that our members can focus on running their organizations and providing critical direct support to New Yorkers. These are the nonprofits that support our State's children, seniors, those experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, individuals who are incarcerated or otherwise involved in the justice system, immigrants, and individuals coping with substance abuse and other mental health and behavioral challenges.

This year as the COVID-19 pandemic tore through every corner of New York State, State contracted human services workers were thrust onto the frontlines of a global health crisis—ensuring high-risk populations such as seniors and disabled New Yorkers had access to food and mental health support, providing childcare for the families of first responders, running drop-in centers and shelters for homeless New Yorkers, supporting our State's youth struggling to keep up with their education without resources to learn remotely, and ensuring New Yorkers have access to the skills, training, and education needed to respond and recover from this pandemic economically.

FY22 State Budget Cuts Impacting the Human Services Sector

Governor Cuomo's FY22 budget cuts severely affect the human services sector, since June 2020, the State has withheld 20% of contract payments while demanding providers to do 100% of the work, putting vital organizations in financial peril. The 5% withholding of payments on human services contracts comes at an immense cost and deep harm to the state's most marginalized communities and neighborhoods. New York State cannot recover from COVID-19 without the human services sector. The nonprofit human services sector employs over 200,000 workers only

in New York City and has seen a net loss of 44,000 jobs since February 2020 with no job rebound in sight. This is especially devastating because New York City's human services workforce comprises of 82% women and 80% people of color), making providers a vital employer in communities of color who continue to be the hardest hit by COVID-19. Our State's failure to have a strong and fully funded human services sector undermines the scope and effectiveness of essential services during a time of desperately growing need and sets back our State's journey towards recovery. The State must pay all nonprofit contracts immediately, register late contracts, and put a halt to the 5 percent withholding on state contracts so New York residents who need critical health, mental health, domestic violence, housing, nutrition, and early childhood education services - to name a few - do not lose access to critical lifelines of support nor suffer anymore profound economic and social harm.

What is missing in the FY22 Budget?

The State must allocate funds in the FY22 Budget for emergency pay for human services workers. The need for human services increased exponentially during the pandemic as residents from across New York State struggled with economic uncertainty caused by revenue shortfalls at the state and local levels, widespread layoffs, as well as social isolation due to mandatory shutdowns. Workers in the human services sector immediately stepped up, rapidly adapting and transitioning service delivery models to meet residents and communities' needs. It is past time for the State to recognize human services workers as essential workers and allow them to receive emergency pay for their crucial work to combat COVID-19 in their communities.

As well, the State must invest in our communities by enacting sensible revenue-raising policies, such as the Ultra-Millionaires Tax and the Pied-a-Terre Tax, so that we overcome the budget deficit. By raising revenue, the State will be able to invest in the human services sector to help stabilize communities ravaged by COVID 19 and structural racism.

Conclusion:

In closing, cuts to human services during a pandemic and the refusal to listen to the human services sector deeply harmed the very communities in crisis the Cuomo's administration claims to support. These actions obstructed our State's recovery in the communities already most impacted by COVID-19 due to structural racism, ableism, and income inequality, with Black and brown New Yorkers suffering the most profound harm. In order to support recovery in the communities that need it most, funding for the jobs and services that the human services sector provides must be restored and bolstered. Without immediate action, it will only be more difficult for our State to recover and rebuild.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify. We value our partnership with the State legislature and know you stand with us in our call to address this crisis.

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