

**TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK**  
**Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature**  
**Human Services Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2023-2024**

**Submitted by:**  
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On behalf of UJA-Federation of New York, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of maintaining and expanding support for the human services sector.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA has more than 50 thousand engaged donors in the New York area, supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services, and allocates over \$150 million each year to strengthen Jewish life, combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

**Human Services COLA**

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent inflation has dramatically and disproportionately impacted the lives of all New Yorkers, particularly those living in poverty, further lifting-up the effects of systemic inequality and the real challenges New York State faces. In response to these needs, UJA's network of human services partners has been on the front lines since the pandemic hit, assisting New Yorkers of all backgrounds throughout the five boroughs of New York City, Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk counties. UJA's network provides a wide range of services, including childcare, mental health supports, case management services, older adult programming, and access to food.

The pandemic further exacerbated fiscal challenges faced by human services nonprofits—personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and technology enhancements had to be secured, developed, and maintained to ensure continued service delivery. The inclusion of the 5.4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in the FY 2023 enacted budget brought some relief to certain human services sector employees whose positions were included in statute. However, not all programs or titles were eligible for this increase. Additionally, despite a 5.4% COLA for some employees, UJA's network of nonprofits continues to struggle to recruit and retain its workforce while significant inflation has increased their operating costs.

While UJA thanks Governor Hochul for including a 2.5% COLA for state contracted human service workers in the FY 2024 Executive Budget, we recognize a more substantial investment is needed to further support the work of human services agencies and personnel. Additionally, the Governor's proposed 2.5% COLA is still not inclusive of all State-contracted human services programs. As it is currently written, in both the Aid to Localities and Article VII bills, only certain human services programs within certain agencies are authorized to

provide the COLA. State agencies should review their portfolios to ensure that all human services programs are provided a COLA. Having this COLA implemented across-the-board and inclusive of all human services nonprofits under contract with New York will help achieve better pay equity across the State. **We urge the Legislature to include an 8.5% COLA in the enacted budget in order to keep the wages of human services workers in line with inflation and help nonprofits address increased costs of operations.** Clarifying language must also be incorporated to ensure that all eligible human services are funded.

### **Services for Holocaust Survivors Living in Poverty**

Roughly 40% of New York State's remaining Holocaust survivors are living in poverty. A survivor is an individual, Jewish or non-Jewish, who experienced persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime. They were targeted due to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities, and political ideology. They survived concentration camps or were forced to flee their homes and countries. More than sixty percent of Holocaust survivors emigrated from the former Soviet Union before coming to the United States; they receive little-to-no Social Security income and are extremely poor.

As New York continues to support its immigrant communities and address the rise of anti-Semitism and hate crimes, it is imperative that we not leave Holocaust survivors behind. In FY 2023, the Executive and Legislature jointly invested \$2.6 million to support case management services for Holocaust survivors. This year, Governor Hochul provided \$1 million in her Executive Budget proposal. **UJA asks the Legislature to match last year's funding levels and include \$1.6 million to bring the total funding for case management services for Holocaust survivors to \$2.6 million in FY 2024.**

Today, the youngest survivors are in their mid-70s, and as they age, they require even more care. The terrible trials and traumas they suffered in their earlier years show dire effects with age. While every year the number of Holocaust survivors decline, the cost of care significantly increases.

COVID-19 has been particularly painful for Holocaust survivors, many of whom already suffer from post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and other mental health complications, and the trauma Holocaust Survivors experience due to their childhoods is exacerbated by the pandemic. Survivors feel they are being locked up in their homes. They feel cut off from their social supports and lifelines. An increasing number of survivors are suffering from Alzheimer's and other dementias. Their family caregivers or professional home health aides' access to their homes is further complicated by COVID-19 precautions, and many of them have experienced the sudden loss of family and friends.

Over the past two years, survivors have turned to social service providers more than ever to support their physical, emotional, and financial needs. Similarly, providers have had to quickly pivot to provide survivors with programming and resources they can access from their homes, while still feeling the support of their communities.

### **A total investment of \$2.6 Million will support case management services for Holocaust survivors statewide, and provide access to:**

- **Benefits and support** through Case Managers who are specially trained in the psychological impact of the Holocaust.
- **Mental Health Services** including home visits to help survivors work through the traumas that now manifest in sleep disturbance, anxiety, depression and inability to trust.
- **Trauma Informed Care** provided by professionals who recognize and avoid possible triggers, thereby reducing the potential for re-traumatization.
- **Crisis Prevention** to help stave off eviction and hunger.

- **Legal Services** and entitlement counseling
- **Emergency Financial Assistance** for food, housing, prescriptions, medical and dental care
- **Socialization Programs** to reduce isolation.
- **Training & Support** for Caregivers and home health aides working with survivors.
- **End of Life Care** including hospice and ethical wills

New York must increase its commitment to Holocaust survivors. It is crucial to provide specialized care and support programs for survivors to enhance their quality of life and allow them to live out their remaining years with dignity. We ask that the 2024 budget allocate \$2.6 million to support Holocaust survivors living in poverty throughout New York State.

### **Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities**

UJA thanks the Legislature for supporting N/NORCs, particularly the \$825,000 enhancement secured in FY 2023 to address the cost of mandated healthcare management and assistance in N/NORC contracts.

N/NORCs were established with the ultimate goal of transforming residential complexes and neighborhoods to meet the needs of older residents and enable them to remain living independently in their homes; thrive in their communities, and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement. The density of older adults and their proximity to each other further fosters creative approaches to providing health and social services. N/NORC programs provide case management services, nursing services, recreational, social, and cultural activities, and ancillary services tailored to meet the needs of each community.

A key component of the N/NORC program model is health care management and assistance. Most programs employ nurses to fulfill this requirement. Nurses provide services to N/NORC residents that might not otherwise exist in the community, such as medication education, diabetes testing, flu shots, mobility, and balance screenings, and helping clients get in touch with doctors. Many residents rely on these services as a critical source of health care and value the consistent, quality care they provide. Despite this service being required by NYSOFA contracts, it remains an unfunded mandate.

N/NORCs were previously able to secure nursing hours pro-bono by partnering with hospitals, retired nurses, or supervised student nurses. However, in the wake of Medicaid Redesign and billing changes, in addition to an aging population with increased needs, these arrangements are becoming unstable, and many nursing services providers have cut their pro-bono hours. With many of these partnerships greatly diminished or fully terminated, N/NORCs must find funding to pay for hours that were previously free, essentially spending more to maintain the same level of service.

The Legislature's support for the N/NORC healthcare requirement is crucial to programs' ability to fulfill this unfunded mandate. However, this investment was not included in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal. **We ask that the Legislature invest \$1 million in FY 2023- 2024 to support the N/NORC healthcare mandate.** This will provide funding for N/NORC programs that have struggled with the loss in pro-bono nursing services over the last several years.

As New York's population ages, the demand for N/NORC programs is also increasing statewide. The N/NORC program last underwent an expansion in 2019, and at that time there were more applicants to the program than the State could afford to fund. **UJA requests a \$1.5 million investment to allow NYSOFA to create six to eight new programs across the State.** NYSOFA has expressed their support for this expansion, and if funding is available, they will issue a competitive procurement to select the new programs. This investment must also be paired with a statute update to increase flexibility on building height restrictions that have limited eligibility in the past, per S.3392 (May) and A.TBD (Rozic).

### **SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program)**

UJA supports the Executive budget proposal to fund SYEP at \$47.1 million, a \$1 million increase from FY23, and is grateful for the Administration's continued support of this program.

Since September 2019, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has required new extensive background checks for staff and volunteers working in School-Age Childcare (SACC) licensed programs. SACC licensed programs include (but are not limited to) SYEP and after school programs. The background checks are required by rules in the Federal Childcare and Community Development Block Grant that was reauthorized and revised in 2014. While UJA supports rigorous background checks to help ensure the safety of children and youth, this process continues to be challenging, particularly in New York City.

As the local regulator, the background check process is managed in New York City by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). DOHMH has continued to struggle to complete the background checks in a timely manner causing delays in the hiring process for staff members in SACC licensed programs. When providers send inquiries about the status of pending background checks to the DOHMH mailbox designated for receiving completed background check paperwork, they often receive delayed responses with little information. Programs have reported having to wait between *two and twelve months* to get staff fully cleared. In some instances, providers reported receiving notifications of successfully completed background checks up to six months after they were completed by the DOHMH. OCFS allows prospective staff to work in programs if they are supervised by fully cleared staff. However, this only works when there are enough cleared staff to oversee the prospective staff awaiting their clearances.

The SYEP is a six-week program, making the current waiting period for background check approvals untenable. Youth over the age of 18 participating in the SYEP, as well as the staff who oversee the program, will both be required to complete and clear the comprehensive background check process before they can work. If these individuals must wait two months for their clearance packets to be processed and cleared, they will miss the entirety of the SYEP.

Before the new regulations were in place providers waited approximately two weeks for completed background checks. Due to the complexity of the new background checks, OCFS and the local registrars at the county level (like the New York City DOHMH) who oversee this process require additional resources and staff to be able to perform the background checks in a timely manner. Providers of SACC licensed programs also require more guidance on the background check process. Specifically, if the process is not expedited before hiring for summer programs begins, OCFS must provide communication to SACC licensed summer programs, like the SYEP, that acknowledges the backlogs in the comprehensive background check system and provides guidance on how to properly staff their programs while waiting for the completion of the comprehensive background checks.

### **Afterschool Programs**

Programs like Advantage and Empire State After School help children, youth and their families by expanding learning opportunities for participants and offering a safe and stimulating place for children and youth when their parents and guardians are at work or unable to supervise them. While UJA is thankful for the inclusion of \$55 million for the Empire State After School program (ESAP) in the Executive's proposal, unfortunately, the Advantage After School program (AASP) was cut \$5 million. UJA requests the Legislature restore the \$5 million cut to the AASP for a total of \$33 million and baseline funding through 2025, when the current award's term will end. If funding is not restored for AASP, 2,500 to 5,000 children and youth will lose access to programs.

Additional funding is needed to increase the per participant rate and improve the overall structural and administrative challenges the programs currently face. Afterschool programs, including those run by CBOs, continue to provide support to students amid staffing shortages, grave under compensation, low reimbursement rates, and contract delays. Yet, these programs saw no increased funding to support their work and were largely left out of direct pandemic response funding. Furthermore, coordinated changes to the Advantage After School Program and Empire State After-School Program reinforce the need to reassess program requirements, timeline, and impact to establish an effective, consolidated, and sustainable afterschool system.

To address these challenges, UJA requests the Legislature include **\$219 million for the new Afterschool Learning and Enrichment Program (ALEP) initiative**. The ALEP initiative will set the course for a new, improved, high-quality afterschool program that merges the best of AASP and ESAP, and strengthens the afterschool infrastructure in the following ways:

- Ensures equitable access to high-quality programs by adopting the base, true cost, per student rate of \$4,300 and/or an established level funding of \$219 million at the onset of the program;
- Ensures continued assessment and modification of per student rates in future rounds consistent with minimum wage increases and cost-of-living adjustments;
- Guarantees afterschool access to at least 50,000 students currently served by ESAP and AASP;
- Prioritizes competitive workforce compensation and professional development;
- Prioritizes technical assistance and evaluation to sustain quality supports; and
- Streamlines regulations, compliances, and RFP and contracting processes.

The Youth Development Program (YDP) allows counties to determine programming that will best meet their local needs. In New York City, the YDP partially funds COMPASS and SONYC after school programs. The YDP was funded at \$14.1 million in the Executive Budget, \$1.5 million less than it was funded in the FY23 enacted budget. **UJA urges the Legislature to restore the \$1.5 million and include an additional \$5 million for a total investment of \$20.6 million, bringing the funding for this program back to its FY 2011 level.**

### **Child Care**

Families need access to safe, affordable, and reliable child care to thrive in New York State. Low-income families specifically struggle to maintain care for their families, forcing them to choose between working and providing care for their children. Without child care, parents and guardians are unable to work effectively, regardless of the location. The child care workforce is largely under-compensated which directly impacts a provider's ability to retain staff and maintain quality care.

While the Executive Budget made investments in child care (modest investments in the child care workforce, increasing income eligibility for child care assistance) more transformative measures must be taken to ensure every child has access to high-quality child care and every child care worker is compensated fairly. UJA urges the state to make the following investments/policy changes implemented simultaneously, to put New York on the path to a strong universal child care system:

**1. Direct Investment in the Child Care Workforce: \$1.2 billion-**This would provide \$1 billion for a child care workforce compensation fund that would give all members of the workforce an average compensation increase of \$12,500 per year until the State has transitioned to a new reimbursement methodology and pay scale. The remaining \$190 million would be used to create a health insurance premium support program for providers, helping providers to cover the costs of health insurance premiums for employees who are no longer eligible for Medicaid due to salary increases.

**2. Help More New Yorkers Access Child Care: \$1.2 billion-** \$60 million of this investment would be used to extend child care assistance to children currently ineligible due to their immigration status, \$100 million would eliminate income cliffs for families seeking child care assistance by increasing income eligibility to 85% of

State Median Income and reducing family co-pays to 1% of income over the Federal Poverty Level across the state, and \$1 billion would be used to adopt categorical eligibility for child care assistance where no other ID proof would be needed to gain child care assistance if you already participate in another public assistance program.

**3. Pay Based on Enrollment: \$60 million-**This investment would allow providers to be compensated based on enrollment, not attendance helping providers to deal with the ongoing costs of operating a child care program like maintaining teacher/student ratios.

Each of these investments will strengthen New York State's child care system by investing in the essential child care workforce, removing unnecessary access barriers, and ensuring all the state's children can access child care, regardless of immigration status.

## **Foster Care and Child Welfare**

### **Increase Prevention Funding**

New York State's child welfare system provides preventive services to families to prevent placing children into foster care. The services are tailored to individual family needs including access to food, housing, clothing, mental health and medical services and any additional services and supports the family requires to remain safe and healthy. Since 2002, the state has invested in an open-ended child welfare funding stream which provides an incentive to counties to invest in prevention services, by reimbursing county funds spent on prevention. Investment into prevention services has contributed to a 58% decline in the number of children and youth entering the foster care system statewide from 2002 to 2021. For several years, the state has reduced the reimbursement level for prevention services down to 62%, from the statutory requirement of 65%. The continued cost shift from the state to the local governments, puts a strain on the counties' ability to invest in community-based programs for families and limits the ability for agencies to hire and retain staff to meet the demand for services. **UJA is supportive of A.2807 which would increase reimbursement rate to 75% for preventative child protective services.**

### **Invest in Foster Care Workforce Salaries**

Child welfare agencies continue to struggle with recruitment and retention of staff. The salaries that agencies are able to pay are simply not enough to compete with what the public sector can pay, as well as the benefits that are offered. Agencies report losing caseworkers to public schools, hospitals, and Managed Care Organizations. Programs all too often act as a "training ground" for employees, as they receive excellent training and experience in trauma-informed approaches that then make them marketable to other organizations. This constant churn of worker turnover causes longer lengths of stay for children in foster care. **To combat staff turnover, UJA supports S.3101/A.3411 which would increase the salaries of the foster care workforce by including \$17 million for the next three fiscal years to raise salaries for workers in foster care programs.**

### **Providing a Career Pathway for the State's Child Welfare Workforce**

In addition to salary increases, child welfare staff also report needing support in pursuing higher education. The NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship and the NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program help the child welfare workforce attain their higher education goals. The Scholarship and Program were funded at \$50,000 each (\$100,000 total) in the Executive Budget. **UJA recommends the Legislature increase funding to \$2 million (\$1 million for each of these programs) in the enacted budget.**

Many staff members working in child welfare programs struggle each month to pay their student loan bills, often amounting to several hundred dollars--comparable to a rent or mortgage payment. Increased state

investment into the child welfare workforce's higher education pursuits will not only assist in staff recruitment and retention efforts but will also create the next generation of child welfare leaders in the field.

### **Adult Literacy Education (ALE)**

ALE funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes and is one of the few state funding streams able to address the needs of lower-level learners. In New York State, there are 3.9 million individuals who lack their high school diploma, English language proficiency, or both.

UJA was disappointed to see that the Executive Budget cut ALE funding by \$1.5 million, meaning that over 1000 students in current programs will no longer have access to those programs. UJA urges the Governor to restore funding to FY23 levels at \$9.3 million so that programs can remain whole. UJA also respectfully requests support for the investment of an additional \$9.3 million in ALE programs for a newly proposed ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund to begin to stabilize and enhance ALE programs. This supplemental funding stream would be allocated to all programs currently receiving ALE funding, effectively doubling the funding for each contract. Increased investment in per-student funding in Adult Literacy Education, when strategically invested by programs in resources, services, and supports, will lead to greater outcomes and a wider range of impacts for adult literacy students, their families, and their communities, and allow programs to better serve the 6,000 New Yorkers currently enrolled. Proposed uses of this funding include: upgrading the program's own technology, internet, and digital access; upgrading the program's classroom facilities and infrastructure; increasing the number of full-time staff and teaching positions and increasing the pay, benefits, and working conditions of teachers to achieve greater parity with K-12, and to cultivate a strong, stable adult education workforce.

Lastly, UJA requests an additional \$9.3 million to reach and serve 3,300 more students at an increased rate per student. With this new \$18.6 million investment, the FY24 funding ask addresses two priorities: 1) sustain and stabilize programs to serve current adult literacy students through the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund, and 2) expand services to reach more students, including new arrivals.

Limited skills make it difficult for individuals to support their children in school, access health care, secure and maintain living-wage jobs, advocate for their rights as workers, and fully participate in the political process. The majority of adults in NYS with limited literacy skills are women and people of color; a majority are immigrants, including many who are undocumented; others are BIPOC who were born and raised in the US but do not have a high school level education. Many of these adults are currently on the frontlines of the pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities.

Adult literacy education is the key to economic security and social mobility. Median wages for adults with a high school diploma or its equivalent are 24% greater than for those without a diploma. Furthermore, higher levels of literacy are associated with greater health knowledge, more efficient use of healthcare services, and the ability to manage chronic health conditions and communicate with healthcare providers.

**Restoration of the \$1.5 million combined with an investment of \$18.6 million in the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund and seats for additional students would allow providers to better serve the over 5,600 New Yorkers enrolled in state funded ALE programs and UJA requests the legislature's support.**

### **Addressing Food Insecurity**

Food access continues to be a concern among New Yorkers. As a result of the pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn, as well as high rates of inflation, nearly two million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity, including one in seven children. New York food pantries and soup kitchens are reporting that they are unable to meet demand and that they served more people in 2022 versus in 2021.

Although UJA's nonprofit partners quickly shifted their operations to better support New York's emergency food efforts by expanding their food pantry operations; helping clients gain access to SNAP and other benefits and raising private dollars to deliver meals to homebound older adults, there is still tremendous unmet need. UJA-Federation submits the following recommendations to ensure that the local food system and supply chain remains intact, that all families are able to access the food and support they need, and that front line community-based organizations (CBOs) can continue to respond effectively to the increased need for emergency food:

- 1) Increase funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) by \$28.5 million for a total of \$63 million to adjust for rising food costs and increased need.
  - a. The Governor's Executive budget cut HPNAP by \$22 million from the level at which it was funded in FY23, as the need for emergency food has only continued to grow. HPNAP provides supplemental food which is distributed through the NYS Emergency Food Program (EFP) network of over three thousand soup kitchens, shelters and pantries. These organizations provide over 200 million meals a year to low-income people across the state. As food insecurity has increased and pantries are seeing an increase in the number of visitors, HPNAP funding has now reverted to the level at which it has been funded at since 2006. Furthermore, the current funding amount, as is, does not meet the standards established by the state, which requires that pantries distribute a total of nine meals per guest (three meals a day for three days). To ensure the program meets its nine meals standard, account for an increase in food prices and work towards meeting the increased need, UJA urges the legislature to fund HPNAP at \$63 million.

In addition to a funding increase, emergency food providers have highlighted a number of changes to the administration of HPNAP that would ensure the program could run more effectively. Among these changes are: Opening up the bidding for more contractors in HPNAP (currently contracts are renewed every 5 years) to allow additional providers as well as smaller food banks to acquire HPNAP contracts and distribute food through the program; Change HPNAP rules to prioritize procurement of more local produce and produce from BIPOC farmers; More flexibility to allow food banks and pantries to spend HPNAP funds on staffing, program administration, nutrition education and infrastructure, including funding for pantries to acquire cold storage equipment; and less frequent reporting to NYS (biweekly at most).

- 2) Expand the Executive Budget proposal to increase funding for the Nourish NY program by \$25 million for a total investment of \$75 million.
  - a. UJA thanks the Governor for including \$50 million for the Nourish NY program in the Executive Budget. The Nourish NY program connects food banks to New York's food manufacturers and farmers directly, not only benefiting food insecure families but also providing an economic benefit to the communities where this food is coming from. Since its launch in 2020, Nourish NY has funded the purchase of over 100 million pounds of food, which equates to over 50 million meals. This program has benefitted millions of households and thousands of farms, serving as a lifeline for New York's farmers and families left struggling due to the



pandemic. UJA urges the legislature to further increase funding for this program by \$25 million to ensure stability for farmers and food banks, as well as the continued support of New York's food insecure families.

- 3) Establish and fund a statewide, permanent Healthy School Meals for All program across all schools, including private schools, participating in the National School Lunch Program at an annual investment of \$187.3 to \$201M.
  - a. UJA joins Community Food Advocates, Hunger Solutions New York, and 170+ organizations statewide in the call for a statewide Healthy School Meal for all Program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a federal policy ensured every student in the nation had access to free school meals – but this ended in June 2022, impacting more than 726,000 New York students. California and Maine have already stepped up and ensured that all students receive free school meals on an ongoing basis. Existing programs in New York leave far too many behind, including families struggling to make ends meet while hovering just above the income limits for free school meals, and kids who qualify, but hesitate to eat due to stigma. Establishing Healthy School Meals for All would only require the state to fund meal costs not covered by federal reimbursement, an anticipated annual investment of \$187.3M to \$201M.
- 4) Increase funding for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) by \$900,000
  - a. Funding for NOEP in the Governor's Executive budget was cut by \$900,000 from FY23 levels. Many New Yorkers are unaware of, or hesitate to apply to, the nutrition assistance programs for which they may be eligible. They may also be unaware of the benefits to which they are entitled. NOEP offers free and confidential services to connect New Yorkers to food assistance programs including SNAP and school meals. Through a NOEP coordinator, a family receives guidance throughout the application process to the endpoint of receiving the benefits. As more New Yorkers qualify for federal nutrition programs, it is important that the funding for NOEP is increased so that all qualifying New Yorkers access the benefits they need. SNAP is not only the first line of defense against hunger but also has the potential to generate economic activity - in a weak economy, \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in economic activity. UJA urges the legislature to increase funding for NOEP back to FY23 levels so that participation is maximized in these vital nutrition assistance programs.

### **Conclusion**

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist our state's most vulnerable and neediest individuals and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please contact Ariel Savransky at [savranskya@ujafedny.org](mailto:savranskya@ujafedny.org) or 212-836-1360 with any questions.