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**Testimony presented by Nancy Wackstein
Executive Director, United Neighborhood Houses**

**Before the New York City Council Youth Services Committee
Honorable Lew Fidler, Chair**

Hearing on the Out-of-School Time Request for Proposals

Good afternoon Chair Lew Fidler, and members of the Committee. My name is Nancy Wackstein, and I am the Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses of New York, Inc. (UNH). United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH's membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 37 agencies working at more than 400 sites to provide high quality services and activities to half million New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy and capacity-building activities.

UNH member agencies currently provide after school programming for thousands of children. Our network of agencies, working in diverse communities across the City, is one of the key providers of quality after school to low and moderate income children in New York City today.

As one of the original members of the Out-of-School Time (OST) planning committee in 2004 and 2005 that was convened by then Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, I am deeply saddened by the current state of the OST system and by the Bloomberg administration's lack of commitment to a program it, in fact, created. The proposed level of funding for OST programming is simply insufficient. It will clearly and drastically reduce OST capacity and ultimately dismantle this incredibly vital system. While the recently released OST RFP articulates a laudable vision and a set of goals which characterize the quality OST system we all desire, I regret that the system remains woefully under resourced. .

At its peak DYCD's OST system was able to serve 85,000 young people, and even then it did not meet the full need. Currently, OST is able to serve only 53,000 young people with quality after-school programming. Our providers consistently have overflowing waitlists with parents lining up for the opportunity to receive quality, free, child care. In September 2012, 25,000 families and children will be turned away and will lose their after-school programs, through the elimination of OST Option II (8,000) and the decrease in funding for Option I (17,000).

OST after-school programs allow families to keep working; supports the academic success of children; and provides a safe and nurturing environment that promotes leadership and development.

The OST system is not a babysitting program for children. These programs provide quality services. Our members are embedded in the communities they serve, and the children and families that benefit from this after school system depend on these providers to meet their needs. In September, families will have no options. As an organization that represents OST providers, we will fight this devastating loss. New York City must have a comprehensive, quality after-school system; families and children deserve it.

The new RFP has important enhancements, such as closer alignment between the school day and after school, and including the summer to prevent summer learning loss. However, these improvements won't matter if children and families cannot benefit because there is simply no room. During a time when these services are needed most, they are being reduced by nearly 50% in the span of one fiscal year. On January 6th, DYCD received over 1200 applications from potential providers but is able to provide only 220 awards. That means 4 out of 5 providers will not receive funding. Clearly, this RFP is underfunded. In 2009, OST operated with a budget of \$117 million, in September the operating budget will be a pathetic \$69 million. The need has not decreased, but the capacity to serve those who need it most has.

The OST RFP reduces capacity in middle income neighborhoods, including neighborhoods with NYCHA developments. The RFP divides the city into targeted versus non-targeted zip codes based on youth poverty levels, English Language Learners and eligibility for subsidized child care. This harshly impacts providers that serve NYCHA residents since their sites may be located in a non-targeted zip code. The non-targeted zip codes contain many after-school programs with histories of full enrollment that have demonstrated a high demand for their services. These include many centers in NYCHA developments in neighborhoods that are otherwise more affluent.

In the new RFP, OST will provide services for children ages 5-13, with a majority of funding to support elementary aged children. As you know, working families depend on these services in order for them to continue to work with the expectation that their children are in safe and nurturing environments. Parents will be faced with a three o'clock crisis, when their children are dismissed from school and they are still working. Where will these six, seven and eight year olds go? Families in our network have spoken out against these cuts, and are in panic mode, unsure of what will they will do in September. Many have confirmed that if they cannot continue their after-school programs they may be forced to sacrifice their jobs in an effort to keep their children safe.

With the current level of children living in poverty in New York City rapidly increasing, after-school programs are a necessity. Poverty impacts children's academic achievement as well as

their developmental growth¹. After-school programs, such as OST serve as buffers to the impact of poverty by supplementing classroom lessons and providing extended learning time.

Mayor Bloomberg created the OST system, and has labeled himself the education mayor. Underfunding after-school is counterproductive to his stated mission.

While OST is being slashed by 50 %, the city is also closing seven Beacon programs and eliminating 10,000 child care slots, all while squeezing our providers' resources by issuing three critical RFPs within a year. Compounded together, these actions will cripple services for NYC's children and families.

We urge both the City Council and the Mayor to work together to restore this drastic loss in the after-school system. We must sustain the current commitment of \$90 million in the DYCD budget for OST, and continue to serve at least 53,000 young people. Every year, providers are left holding the bag, and being held accountable by their communities for cuts the city imposes. Every year, we are in the same predicament of pleading and begging for restoration of critical after-school programming. Therefore, in addition to restorations we urge that these funds be baselined in the City Budget to demonstrate the city's dedication to New York's most vulnerable residents, children and youth.

Mayor Bloomberg must make the investment in children and youth. Any reduction to children served is unacceptable.

Thank you again for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to continuing to work with you on behalf of New York City's children and families.

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UNH Members: Arab American Family Support Center – Broadway Housing Communities- BronxWorks - CAMBA - Center for Family Life in Sunset Park - Chinese American Planning Council - Claremont Neighborhood Centers - Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation - East Side House Settlement - Educational Alliance - Goddard Riverside Community Center - Grand Street Settlement - Greenwich House - Hamilton-Madison House - Hartley House - Henry Street Settlement - Hudson Guild - Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House - Kingsbridge Heights Community Center - Lenox Hill Neighborhood House - Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center - Mosholu Montefiore Community - New Settlement Apartments - Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation - Project Hospitality - Queens Community House - Riverdale Neighborhood House - SCAN New York - School Settlement Association - Shorefront YM-WHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach, Inc - Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers - St. Nicholas Alliance - Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center - Sunnyside Community Services - Union Settlement Association- United Community Centers - University Settlement Society

¹ Brooks-Gunn, J & Duncan GJ. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *The Future of Children. Children and Poverty*, 7, 55-71.