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Testimony of University Settlement before the New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Committee on Aging, Chair Crystal Hudson

Submitted by Sofiya Pidzyraylo,
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University Settlement

March 8, 2024

Chair Hudson, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm Sofiya Pidzyraylo, Program Director of the Village View NORC at University Settlement.

Every year, University Settlement partners with 40,000 New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn through programming for all ages.

Overall, we call for more funding for older adults. NYC Aging's budget is the smallest even while the older adults make up around 15% of the total population and is growing rapidly. According to a recent report from the Center for Urban Future, the population has increased 13.6% between 2011-2021, and the poverty rate of older adults in NYC is 17.9%.¹ These numbers point to a need to invest further in older adults programs and services.

As we know, COVID-19 changed many of our expectations and preferences. Older adults are more used to a home-centered life. Our older adults center and programs have had to be creative and flexible in inviting our participants back into our spaces and rethink our programs to better reflect people's concerns. Often, we have needed to continue online or hybrid offerings in addition to in person services – essentially creating more of a workload for our staff.

Older adults now use our services differently, but they still depend on our centers, programs, and staff, and we may need different metrics to assess the success of older adults centers, which continue to offer a necessary community that our older adults need.

For home-delivered meals, we want to emphasize that the reimbursement rate for home-based meals needs to be increased to at least \$15.31 per meal in the FY25 budget. This would better reflect the average true cost of providing services, including the impact of inflation.

We also urge NYC Aging to reverse the home-delivered meal restriction on MLTC clients. Not everyone on Medicaid has a home health aide, and those who want a home health aide face difficulty applying for help and retaining

¹ Bowles, Jonathan, Eli Dvorkin and Charles Shaviro. *Keeping Up With An Aging New York State*. Center for Urban Future. January 2023. https://nycfuture.org/research/keeping-pace-with-an-aging-new-york-state?oref=nyn_firstread_nl



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aides. This restriction simply means that many older adults are not getting meals that they need.

Many of our participants who use home healthcare saw their hours reduced this year. As older adults are now more used to online and remote options, they are staying home and need more home health aide hours. We have heard that participants have seen hours reduced from 40 to 30 per week and that newer enrollees are being offered fewer hours.

Additionally, our older adults need free or affordable access to the internet. Almost all of our low-income older adults depend on the ACP program, which is ending in April 2024. These older adults have worked hard to become more digitally proficient, and we have worked hard for two years to support them. The loss of free internet means that many of them will no longer be able to connect with friends, family, and support online.

We would also like to see older adult centers offer the same nursing services as the services provided at NORCS as well as more support for older adults raising and caring for grandchildren, like the Grandparent Group, which served about 30 seniors from Ingersoll/Whitman houses bi-weekly.

Finally, we need to support the staff working with older adults. We must:

- Include a multi-year Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human services workers, with 5% in FY25 and 3% for the two following fiscal years to immediately relieve the economic pressures faced by the workforce.
- Pass and fully fund legislation to create a prevailing wage schedule for human services workers to address long-term needs of the sector.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, you can reach me at spidzyraylo@universitysettlement.org.