



The Voice of the Human Services Community

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June 10, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bill de Blasio and Members of New York City Council,

The Human Services Council (HSC) stands in full support of the demands of the Communities United for Police Reform’s NYC Budget Justice campaign – along with countless community groups - that calls for a reduction of the New York Police Department’s (NYPD) operating budget by \$1 billion in FY21 and for that funding to be redistributed to a substantial investment in existing critical youth and social services programs as well as the development of new initiatives to address systemic racism and support communities of color.

As a membership organization representing over 170 human services providers in New York, HSC members commit to proactively address the anti-Blackness and racism within our own institutions and to advocate for the people and communities we serve. At this moment, our advocacy includes pushing back on the expanded role of the NYPD into our services and directly calling out a budget that continues to underfund social services while maintaining the immense budget of a police department at the expense of our communities.

The following are recommendations for how you, as New York City elected officials, can redirect funds from the NYPD and into programs that support those who have been hardest hit both by COVID-19 and address police accountability. Change is overdue and needed immediately. There is much more work to be done than can be captured in this list, and the City must commit to working with anti-racist activists and communities of color to comprehensively combat the crisis of anti-Blackness and deep-rooted structural racism in our City.

- **Fully restore all summer youth programs, including COMPASS/SONYC, Beacon, and NYCHA-based Cornerstone programs, which are facing \$79M in cuts, and work with providers on proposed alternative program models suggest by advocates so that**

youth have safe places to go and learn this summer. Young people of color face massive gaps in education and work-based learning that have been further exacerbated by the inequity of remote learning. The child welfare and juvenile justice systems should not be the outcome for poor Black and Brown children, but we fear that lack of programming and the current civic unrest will make that pathway increasingly inevitable. We are leaving our children and youth with no productive activities for the summer, which will lead to devastating consequences. The Campaign for Children has put forward models for both remote and in-person summer programs and should be contacted to partner on this effort.

- **Fully restore funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) at the cost of \$124M and expand the program.** Last year, 76,000 youth applicants were turned away from the SYEP due to lack of open spots. As the youth leaders of Teens Take Charge have made clear to the City through their testimony and advocacy to Save SYEP, programs like SYEP help reduce the gaps in work-based learning and social capital that the segregation in NYC creates. HSC supports the youth leaders of Teens Take Charge and echo their calls to expand the SYEP program.
- **Ensure the COLA for city-contracted human services workers does not expire by including a 3% increase on the personnel services line of all human services contracts at the cost of \$48M and work on long-term solutions to ensure that human services workers finally earn fair pay for their labor.** Years of underfunding of the sector has resulted in the human services workforce being some of the lowest compensated workers in New York City's economy. 60 percent of human services workers qualify for public assistance while they perform lifesaving work every day, particularly on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. When elected officials refuse to listen to providers and drastically undervalue the services they provide, it is the human services workforce, which is 80% people of color, who are disproportionately impacted. If New York City is committed to investing in social services and community-based solutions beyond policing, these workers MUST be paid fairly. A COLA is needed now, as well as a commitment to achieving real livable wages and parity for this essential workforce.
- **Fund the home-delivered meal program with an immediate \$26M investment to cover the real costs of running the program which has proven be a true lifeline to many New Yorkers.** The home delivered meal

program provides nutritious meals to homebound individuals which allow recipients to delay or avoid institutional care and remain in their communities. The average cost of a home delivered meal in an urban area is \$11.78, not including New York State's \$15 minimum wage, which is much lower than the DFTA-provided rate of \$9.58 per meal. This stark contrast between funding levels and real costs puts the program at risk as providers struggle to close the gap in funding. The current home-delivered meals RFP – which we think should be held for now given the COVID-19 pandemic – needs to be funded at this higher level going forward. LiveOn New York should be contacted about this recommendation.

- **Fund the Unity Works Program, a workforce development program specifically aimed at creating work and education opportunities for homeless and runaway LGBTQI youth at \$2.7M for 4 years.** The contract for this RFP have already been awarded, but the funding has been put on pause. 90% of New York City's homeless LGBTQI youth are people of color who are – particularly the Black youth – at an increased risk of criminalization. The Unity Works funding would help improve the odds of these LGBTQI youth obtaining employment and furthering their educational pathways.
- **Fund \$15M over the next 5 years for a CCITNYC pilot program to reduce the role of police in responding to behavioral health emergencies and explore ways to integrate mobile crisis and/or Health Engagement Assessment Teams (HEAT) into 911 dispatch in lieu of police response.** There is a clear intersection between race and disability when it comes to which communities are most impacted by police violence that must not be ignored. One of the first steps to addressing this crisis is to ensure that police are not called for behavioral health emergencies. Since the NYPD started the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training in 2015, at least 17 mental health recipients have died or been shot in police encounters, including 15 deaths. CCITNYC has developed a detailed plan and budget for a pilot project in two heavily impacted precincts. The pilot will pair EMTs with “peers” (individuals with lived mental health experience) who will be the first responders for people who experience mental health crises rather than the police. The Coalition of Behavioral Health has recommended the expansion of mobile crisis and HEAT.
- **Renew \$58.2M in funding for immigration legal services to ensure continuity of services and to help defend immigrants against the**

aggressive, anti-immigrant policies from Washington that continue even during this pandemic. Alongside the hostility from Washington, profiling in NYC consistently puts immigrant communities at risk. During the current anti-racism protests, undocumented New Yorkers risk deportation just for peacefully assembling or getting wrapped up in New York's recent ill-planned curfew.

- **Increase the emergency cash assistance fund for those New Yorkers cruelly left out of the federal relief packages, including direct cash payments and help for small businesses.** With immigrants disproportionately working while being increasingly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, New York City must stand firm in its commitment to these residents and continue leading the country in narrowing the inequality gap for immigrant New Yorkers. The New York Immigration Coalition has been advocating for this fund and should be contacted to partner with the City on this effort.
- **Enhance the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund (NSF) to \$10M.** Leadership development, financial management, management information systems improvements, and outcomes system development supported through the NSF will allow more community groups to strengthen their ability to serve their communities. The cap on personnel should also be removed to allow organizations to fund staff positions for lasting capacity. The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families has advocated for this – along with many other coalitions – and should be contacted to partner on this effort.
- **Provide \$70M in annual Bridge Program Funding.** These programs provide access to education and training in a continuum that creates an "on ramp" to help lead participants into quality jobs—which is especially important as we see a changing job market post-COVID. To be inclusive and increasingly impactful, the City must not ignore the barriers to immigrant participation in the workforce and a portion of any Bridge Program expansion should be used to fund an innovative pilot Immigrant Workforce Development Initiative. The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families and New York City Employment and Training Coalition have advocated for this and should be contacted to partner on this effort.

- **Invest in comprehensive housing assistance.** The need for affordable housing and homeless prevention – already a crisis in NYC – will only grow in the coming months due to COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown New Yorkers. Greater resources are necessary to keep families housed after the eviction moratorium ends given the alarming projections of unemployment and the number of households experiencing severe rent burden. Short and long-term rent assistance is needed to cover rent arrears and support ongoing rent payments. Eviction prevention services will also be key to addressing housing security further upstream, which is less costly and less traumatic for families with children at risk of homelessness.

This list is only part of the work that needs to be done, and HSC appreciates our limited role in this conversation. The budget is a reflection of our values, and New York City must preserve critical human services programs including discretionary funding that assists hundreds of community organizations.

Our recommendations try to merge the need for immediate investment in critical programs with communities hit hardest by COVID-19, programs that reduce police interactions with communities, and ways to support people of color. We cannot stress enough that this is not a final and comprehensive list, and those who have done the difficult work of calling out inequity and racism need to be given seats at the table with real authority to invest critical dollars in communities of color.

Respectfully,

Michelle Jackson



Executive Director, Human Services Council

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