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NY Human Services Providers to the Governor: Our Sector Is Key to NY Success

Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York, a statewide coalition of 350 nonprofit human services providers, is responding today to the Governor’s 2018 State of the State. Our organizations are on the front lines of helping New Yorkers and actualizing the Governor’s vision for equity. Without the full support and resources of the state, we will be unable to carry out our critical services. We were disappointed the governor did not specify his intentions to fund this sector more clearly. While we are aware of the challenging nature of this year’s budget, human services are the State’s first line of defense in difficult times, making it more important than ever that they be strong.

Nonprofit human services providers across the state provide essential services each day to millions of New Yorkers, including early childhood education, afterschool, child welfare, disability services, senior case management, and more. While nonprofits offer a diverse range of services to New Yorkers of all ages and walks of life, they share a common thread: serious resource challenges, in large part due to the underfunding of government contracts. Without investment, they will also share very tough choices—to cut back programming, lay off staff, or close altogether.

Strong nonprofits are necessary for the Governor’s vision of equity, and therefore, we are seeking crucial investments to begin to chip away at decades of underfunding. Strong Nonprofits is advocating for $85 million for the human services workforce in this year’s budget. This funding will provide workers with a 3.25% salary adjustment for a workforce that hasn’t seen a cost of living adjustment in eight years, and cover the cost of the minimum wage adjustment which remains an unfunded mandate on State contracts. In New York, 60 percent human services workers are eligible for at least one public assistance program, as a result of wages that do not reflect the true cost of living or the skilled services they provide. Statewide the average salary for human services workers is less the $30,000, under half the overall average wage. We are also advocating for $100 million for the Nonprofit Infrastructure
Capital Investment Program. This funding provides resources to address projects vital to the functioning of programs, such as an elevator in a program serving people with disabilities or a backup generator for a heating/cooling center for seniors. None of these urgent needs were mentioned in the Governor’s address on Wednesday and do not appear to be a priority of his administration.

The Governor stated that New Yorker’s “don’t need theoretical progressive politics,” but rather concrete action. He stressed the State’s moral obligation to help those in need and ensure equity, specifically targeting sexism and discrimination, the housing crisis, workforce development, and the opioid epidemic. While we share the Governor’s vision, we understand that these initiatives rest in large part on the backs of human services nonprofits. Vital services like homeless outreach and services aimed at justice involved individuals are carried out by nonprofit organizations and their workers. In citing the age-old challenges of discrimination and sexism, the Governor must acknowledge that equitable wages for a workforce that is 80 percent women and nearly half people of color, are within his power to address.

“Human services nonprofits are reliable community institutions and their employees work tirelessly to provide essential and often mandated services on behalf of New York State. Yet, they are among the most underpaid, unrecognized, and underinvested in by the State. Both agencies and workers are struggling themselves daily to make ends meet while caring for others in need. If New York State leadership truly believes in helping people in need, the sector cannot be neglected. New York State must act now to adequately fund the contracts and wages of human services agencies, or these agencies, upon which they and many New Yorkers depend, may be forced to close their doors.” -Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO and Executive Director of FPWA.

"Governor Cuomo rightly highlighted the epidemic of poverty impacting millions of New Yorkers, but some of his policies and funding decisions are at odds with his words today. Human services organizations across New York contract with the State and local government to address many of the key issues highlighted as priorities, including homelessness, criminal justice, drug addiction and improved health outcomes.

Under Governor Cuomo, human services spending has not kept pace with inflation—to a loss in funding of almost $1.5 billion. The workforce – made up mostly of women and largely people of color – is low paid and the governor has not yet funded the cost of the minimum wage in these nonprofit contracts. That must be a priority along with investments supporting the infrastructure needs of these groups. This becomes even more important as we face severe threats at the Federal level that will deepen inequality. The Governor cannot succeed in his progressive agenda if the nonprofits that are instrumental to that agenda continue to be starved of resources.” -Allison Sesso, Executive Director of the Human Services Council.

“Human services nonprofits are vital to communities throughout New York State because they provide important, lifesaving services to people from all walks of life. While it is encouraging that Governor Cuomo acknowledged the rampant discrimination and inequality impacting millions of New Yorkers, in order to combat these issues he is going to have to bolster one of the most critical workforces in the state. The human services workforce is predominantly made up of college-educated women and largely
people of color who are grossly underpaid and undervalued. If the Governor wants to move forward with his agenda and support communities upstate, downstate, rural and urban, he should start with investing in human services nonprofits.”—Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute

“Governor’s Cuomo 2018 State of the State address challenged all New Yorkers to live up to our state’s motto of ‘ever upward.’ The human services agencies of New York State answer that challenge, day in and day out, to lift up some of our most vulnerable neighbors. So much of this work is done together with the State of New York. We are proud of this partnership. Our capacity to deliver these services is increasingly stretched by rising costs and increased demand. It is critically important that these services be adequately funded so that we may continue the noble task of helping vulnerable New Yorkers to move ‘ever upward.’”— Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York

“New Yorkers face daunting challenges in the year ahead and we applaud Governor Cuomo’s commitment to fighting racism, sexism and hate, including acts of anti-Semitism. The Governor also indicated that his budget will combat poverty and care for the vulnerable. UJA-Federation New York stands with the Governor in this effort, working every day with our partner nonprofits to help hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in need. However, government funding is essential to carrying out this mission, and we hope that the Governor will ensure that adequate resources are allocated in the state budget to continue this life-saving work.” —Eric S. Goldstein, CEO of UJA-Federation NY

“For 45 years, in partnership with New York State, Urban Pathways has provided social services and supportive housing to homeless New Yorkers. We value this partnership and look to the State to adequately invest in our workforce and infrastructure in this year’s budget. Doing so is right for the State, our staff who deliver these services and the homeless individuals who need these services. We were disappointed that our sector’s needs were not included in the Governor’s State of the State address but remain hopeful his Executive Budget will include this critically important human services investment for our State contracted programs.” —Frederick Shack, CEO of Urban Pathways.

"Not-for-Profits are the backbone of the human services sector in NY. Without investing in them and their workforce, we will lose well-trained professionals at all levels, and will therefore risk draining the sector and not having enough workers to serve children, low-income, senior, disabled and other vulnerable populations." —Maria Dibble, Executive Director of Southern Tier Independence Center.

“New York’s leaders and communities rely upon nonprofit organizations to deliver services that are vital to our neighborhoods. UNH appreciates the Governor’s recognition of the important role of organizations like settlement houses, and we look forward to working with him to address the personnel crisis that nonprofit organizations face due to persistent underfunding. We are hopeful that the Executive Budget will include sound financial investments in the nonprofit workforce and infrastructure required to continue strengthening communities.” —Susan Stamler, Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses

“It is impossible to put a price tag on how much it is worth to provide support, training and life savings skills to millions of New Yorkers. Yet, that is what individuals who work in the human services sector do
seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. We are fortunate in New York to have an extraordinary network of human services agencies that reach every corner of the State and provide services to hundreds of thousand individuals. We ask that the State provide salary adjustments and infrastructure support to allow the not for profit sector to lead the nation in service quality and access. Nonprofits cannot continue to subsidize the State. The time to act is now – it cannot wait.” -William Gettman, Executive Director of Northern Rivers Family of Services

“For those of us in the behavioral health sector, we are so extraordinarily lucky to have such a talented and skilled workforce. However, the reality is that many of them are leaving our field for higher paying and less stressful jobs. In order to recruit and retain a quality staff, we need funding and support. We are appreciative that the Governor referenced the importance of the human service workforce in the State of the State. We certainly hope this recognition translates into funding for the human service sector in this year’s budget.” -Glenn Liebman, CEO, Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS)

While the Governor did not demonstrate strong support for the sector in his State of the State, there is still time. We urge him to include sector wide human services investments in his executive budget, due to be released in mid-January. The organizations the Governor depends on to carry out his progressive agenda will only be there if action is taken to be sure they are strong and stable.

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