GOV. CUOMO NEEDS TO MAKE CRITICAL INVESTMENTS IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

By JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN, ERIC GOLDSTEIN AND KEVIN SULLIVAN

New York state committed to much needed cost of living adjustments almost a decade ago but these adjustments have been withheld for eight years. This and other disinvestments are seriously costing our sector.

The deferral in cost of living adjustments amounts to $500 million that has not been paid to service providers – which is then claimed as savings by the state. Meanwhile, human services agencies are forced to satisfy new state wage requirements and address increased costs of doing business without cutting services. Each year, the challenge becomes greater and the care of New Yorkers in need is further jeopardized.

When Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the legislature espouse ideals like achieving equity, providing opportunities for all and caring for New Yorkers in need, community agencies
and faith-based organizations like ours are the institutions working to achieve these shared goals.

Community agencies and faith-based organizations have long partnered with government to make sure New Yorkers in need receive support and assistance to survive and thrive. Yet our partnership – even with its alignment in goals – currently falls short. State government contracts do not cover the full cost of running critical programs, leaving many nonprofits with significant funding gaps. Consequently, employees – case workers, day care providers, health aides and administrative staff – often don’t receive the wages or pay raises needed to care for their own families. As a result turnover is high, infrastructural needs get sidelined, facilities become outdated, technology lags and waitlists for services grow.

When the governor and legislature raised the minimum wage in 2016, many human service agencies applauded the move not only on behalf of those we serve, but also for our workforce which does the hard work on the ground to provide services. More than half of our workforce was making under $15 per hour. Our workforce is over 80 percent women. Some 44 percent are women of color whose pay already lags behind other groups. They need and deserve higher pay, but the funding allotted in state contracts that often determines their pay has not budged in recent years.

It’s common sense – and our common obligation – to make sure this workforce, their agencies, and by extension the New Yorkers they serve, have the necessary resources to continue offering high quality, compassionate services. That’s why Catholic Charities, FPWA, and UJA are among the leaders of Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York, a coalition of 350 nonprofit human service providers operating throughout New York state. Together, we are calling on Cuomo and the state Legislature to make critical investments in our sector in this year’s final budget.

We extend our thanks to the Assembly, which included critical investments for the sector in their recent one house budget. Since the government relies on our services to help low-income New Yorkers, it is shortsighted and morally unacceptable to fund contracts below what’s needed to ensure decent wages and quality services.

Equity for all New Yorkers includes adequate government funding of human services. Cuomo and the state Legislature have an obligation to fund fair salaries and full costs for the staff and agencies caring for our fellow New Yorkers in need. Doing otherwise threatens New York's leadership as a caring state in which fairness and compassion for those in need are paramount and ongoing priorities.

New York state can and needs to do better.

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