Poverty-related issues such as homelessness or family crisis treatment like opioid addiction need more than a simple infusion of cash. Addressing the underlying issues and building community resilience requires long-term, community-based organizations.
dedicated to ensuring that families and individuals have access to local programs that address the stability of their communities.

State government appreciates this expertise as it contracts with human service organizations to deliver programs on its behalf, but government leaders fail to provide the funding necessary to fully support the organizations’ long-term stability. Unfortunately, state contracts rarely cover the full cost of human services, which has resulted in a chronically underfunded sector with crumbling infrastructure and an undercompensated workforce. The absence of adequate funding directly undermines the long-term stability of this sector, which undermines the short- and long-term stability of its workforce and clients.

Employees in the nonprofit human services sector are poorly compensated, despite their experience and education — 41% percent have a four-year college degree and another 25% have some college education. As a result, these dedicated workers often find themselves relying on government benefits to support their own families. Low wages drain talent from our sector as the workers with experience move on to find jobs that provide better compensation. Employee turnover undermines human services programs, which are best served by a stable workforce, whose members earn the trust of their clients and can most effectively help them.

The human services sector vigorously supported Governor Cuomo’s efforts to increase the minimum wage, but we were disappointed when our sector’s contracts were never adjusted by the state to fund the wage increases for human services employees. Unlike for-profit businesses, nonprofit human service organizations cannot increase the cost of their services to pay for higher wages. These increased wages must be paid for by the state.

The governor and state Legislature are currently negotiating the new budget for the state fiscal year that beings on April 1. We have joined a statewide coalition of 350 nonprofit human services providers, Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York, in order to call on the state to make key investments to strengthen the human services sector.

One of our key requests is that the state fund the minimum wage for human service contracts, so that we can provide much-needed salary increases for this workforce.

Outdated infrastructure is also a major concern among nonprofit organizations.
Building repairs and technology upgrades are not included in contracts, yet are essential to running quality programs. The state created the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program (NICIP) to address this issue, but, unfortunately, current funding levels are not sufficient to support current needs. Hundreds of nonprofits have applied for a very limited number of grants and we call on state leaders to add funding to NICIP to support these outstanding grant applications.

Without these critical investments in our workforce and capital for our facilities, nonprofit human services organizations will be forced to serve fewer families, children, immigrants, and older adults in the coming year. The New York State Assembly has included these items in its budget priorities and now we need the governor and the State Senate to support funding the minimum wage and continuing to fund infrastructure.

Without this investment it will be our communities that ultimately suffer.

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Susan Stamler is the Executive Director of United Neighborhood Houses, an association of settlement houses that reaches more than 750,000 New Yorkers each year. On Twitter @UNHNY.

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