Chronic Human Services Underfunding Undercuts a Progressive Women’s Agenda

Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York is calling for the immediate reinstatement of the statutory human services workforce cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the FY 2020 State Budget.

BACKGROUND
Governor Cuomo has deferred the statutory COLA for eight of the last ten years, withholding over half a billion dollars from human services employees—a burden borne almost entirely by women.

Women make up an astonishing 81% of the human services and direct care workforce in New York. This equates to 268,900+ skilled, well-educated workers who are paid significantly less than women in New York’s private sector, leading to increased staff turnover and jeopardizing the quality of service delivery.

“New York can and must continue to lead and fight back to protect equality and rights of women.” – Governor Cuomo

FAIR PAY IS MORE THAN A TALKING POINT
Governor Cuomo has an extensive women’s agenda, including the launch of a Gender Gap study and Women’s Economic Empowerment Initiative to provide training and job placement services for women. At the same time, he has backed executive budget cuts at the expense of underpaid human services workers, who are predominantly women and heavily women of color. Chronic underfunding constrains these workers to the edges of poverty, reinforcing the gender wage gap and preventing New York from meeting its equity goals.

For too long, the State government has relied on human services employees to provide vital services to the public without doing its part to pay them a livable wage. If this Administration really is the women’s champion it purports to be, it will take concrete steps to resolve decades of underinvestment and fairly compensate this fundamental workforce. Reinstating the statutory human services COLA in the FY 2020 State Budget is a necessary step in this direction.