

Testimony
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services
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Submitted by
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on behalf of The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York - a federation of 90 contracting agencies and providers of social services - on the challenges we face entering the FY 2022 budget season. I am Beatriz Diaz Taveras, executive director of Catholic Charities Community Services, one of these 90 human services agencies.

The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York seeks to uphold the dignity of each person as made in the image of God by serving the basic needs of the poor, troubled, frail and oppressed of all religions. We collaborate with parishes, as well as non-Catholic and Catholic partners, to build a compassionate and just society. Through a network of administered, sponsored, and affiliated agencies, Catholic Charities delivers, coordinates, and advocates for quality human services and programs touching almost every human need.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the events leading up to and in the aftermath of the 2020 elections have dramatically impacted the human services sector and the communities we serve. Addressing the realities of inequality, lack of opportunity, and exclusion is already embedded in Catholic Charities' work and is the context within which our advocacy work will be conducted in 2021 and beyond.

Within this context, we would like to bring your attention to the following items:

Sustaining & Strengthening Human Service Provider Agencies:

New York engages a broad range of private non-profit agencies – large, small, faith-based and other – to meet critical human service needs. These partnerships are an efficient and effective use of public funds to meet the needs of millions of vulnerable New Yorkers. Increased funding constraints, redundant regulations and reimbursement redesigns seriously threaten the operation and facilities of these programs. New government mandates, such as minimum wage increases, are well-intentioned but not accompanied by contract increases that affect the entire human services sector, leading to agreements that do not fully fund the cost of providing vital services. Fortunately, there are positive signs, including the NYS Non-Profit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program and the Federal Office of Management and Budget guidance to states and cities on indirect cost rates for non-profits.

- **Contract Withholdings and Rate Adjustments:** The threat of 20% contract withholdings presented significant operational challenges for Catholic Charities and its agencies and threatened to affect both current levels and standards of service. The reduction of these withholdings to 5%, while in one sense a relief, remains contingent on federal assistance and will still pull resources from services upon which New Yorkers

increasingly rely. An annual three percent increase to contract amounts and rates for the next five years would help to ensure that New Yorkers are able to access the services they need as we defeat and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic

Affordable Housing & Homelessness:

The critical shortage of affordable housing and the disparity between incomes and rents forces more New York families to pay a very high proportion of their income for housing. Many previously affordable apartments have moved toward market level rents, and those with low incomes and special needs are particularly impacted by rising costs. State and local governments have important roles in addressing this crisis.

- **Affordable, Supportive, and Homeless Housing:** Catholic Charities supports increased assistance and resources for rental assistance programs that help the unemployed, and for state and local support of similar programs that grant access to market rate housing and assist those, including immigrants, who are ineligible for federal assistance. We support the Governor's inclusion of \$250 million in the FY22 Executive Budget for the Affordable and Homeless Housing Capital Plan, which will enable further progress on the five-year goal of preserving or creating over 100,000 affordable housing units and creating over 6,000 supportive housing units. This investment is consequential in advancing the 20,000-unit, 15-year goal of the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), which has already helped to connect thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness with the services they need. Catholic Charities additionally supports the Executive Budget's allocation of \$128 million for the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program.
- **Housing Assistance for Immigrants:** The undocumented community faces continuous obstacles in accessing housing assistance and is more vulnerable to illegal evictions. Catholic Charities supports a state affordable housing program or voucher system to provide housing assistance for the undocumented community.

Immigration & Legal Services:

Catholic Charities provides services to tens of thousands of immigrants and refugees each year, from legal assistance, case management, referrals, and education, to the administration of the New Americans Hotline. Catholic Charities asks for increased public support that will allow it to bring these vital services to more communities and increase the breadth of services offered.

- **Liberty Defense Project/Pro-Bono Project:** Catholic Charities is also proud to partner with the New York State Liberty Defense Project to increase statewide access to legal assistance through direct legal services programming and its Pro Bono Program. While the Governor drew attention to the vital work of this program while presenting the FY22 Executive Budget, he made its funding contingent on receiving \$15 billion in federal aid. Catholic Charities urges New York State to preserve the Liberty Defense Project (LDP), as well as the statewide Pro Bono Project, in the state budget with a continued \$10.8M in funding to ensure all immigrant New Yorkers' access to free, quality legal counsel.
- **Legal and Social Services:** Supports increased resources to increase access and bring vital legal, social and educational services to NY's immigrants, asylum seekers, Unaccompanied Minors (UAM), day laborers and refugees throughout NYS. Continued outreach, pandemic education, and provision of services in these communities has helped

to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and provided relief for those ineligible for federal assistance.

Supplemental Food Programs:

Catholic Charities supports families facing food shortages, or food insecurity, through a network of food pantries and soup kitchens. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have hosted hundreds of ‘pop-up pantry’ distributions – each supporting between 300 and 500 families. Through State funding, we continue to screen seniors and families for SNAP eligibility.

- **Support for Federal Funding Distributed by State Government:** Federal stimulus legislation has yielded significant investments in and expanded access to emergency food assistance programs, including SNAP, P-EBT and WIC. While recognizing that these expansions result from federal funding distributed by the State, we would look forward to supporting advocacy for these programs should New York State engage with the federal government on this topic.

COVID-Related:

- **Disaster Case Management:** Should FEMA authorize submissions, New York State should apply for FEMA-funded Disaster Case Management assistance that provides long-term support and service coordination for pandemic-affected individuals and families. A proven vehicle that assisted New York’s disaster recovery efforts after 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy, Disaster Case Management will help deploy trained case managers to help ensure that New Yorkers can get back on their feet by coordinating different types of assistance, providing comprehensive and culturally-sensitive services and ensuring that New Yorkers understand how to access the different resources available to them.
- **Prevention & Protection:** While a diversity of Catholic Charities agencies never closed from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, others migrated to remote office environments. The safe continuation or reopening of in-person services relies on possessing the PPE and other equipment to protect staff and clients from COVID-19. Continued provision of this life-saving equipment will help ensure that New Yorkers can receive the services they need without fear of contracting or spreading the virus.
- **Mental Health for Children:** The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an acute effect on child mental health. State action to allow for expanded availability on telehealth have been welcome, and we urge the state action to ensure the sustainability of compassionate and appropriate care for children experiencing mental health trauma.
- **Workforce Assistance:** The post-COVID economy will be markedly different from before in both the number and type of jobs available, and will demand new skills from those joining or rejoining the workforce. State investment in workforce education, training and language learning will help facilitate this economic recovery and foster worker independence.

On behalf of New York’s most vulnerable, and the 90 human services agencies in the Catholic Charities Federation, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and thank you for continuing to serve this great State of New York. Please do not hesitate to contact me for additional detail.