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April 13, 2012

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor
State of New York
The Capitol – 2nd Floor
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I write to you to express my concern and disappointment in your veto of legislative grants in the 2012-2013 budget. In particular, three critically important community based organizations in my district: Erasmus Neighborhood Federation, Ifetayo Cultural Arts Facility, and Sesame Flyers International, are adversely impacted as a result of your line item vetoes.

The funding allocated to these organizations was not new member item funding. I am confounded by your decision to veto reappropriations this year. I urge you to restore these previously appropriated monies passed by the Legislature for these critical organizations.

You have decided to veto funding to organizations that provide vital services at a time when unscrupulous lending practices and the resulting economic downturn devastated the savings, home value, and employment of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. Black and Latino communities suffered disproportionately during this economic recession and have yet to benefit as our economy slowly recovers. In my district, the downturn has been compounded by your budget cuts to education and critical programs for poor and working class New Yorkers, and your veto actions now impose another significant setback to our communities ability to weather the downturn and move towards economic recovery.

For over twenty years Erasmus Neighborhood Federation (Erasmus) in East Flatbush, a non-profit, has provided essential assistance in economic empowerment services including: foreclosure assistance, tenant rights, affordable housing, and employment counseling. Erasmus serves historically underserved communities, particularly immigrants from the Caribbean.

For the past decade, the State of New York and New York City have reduced funding and programming for arts and culture in our public schools. Two organizations in my district that enrich the lives of the youth and educate them into well-rounded and accomplished individuals are Ifetayo Cultural Arts Facility (Ifetayo) and Sesame Flyers International (Sesame Flyers).

Ifetayo, a West African Yoruba word which means "love is enough for joy" has served over 15,000 students in families in central Brooklyn since its founding in 1989. Ifetayo provides six integrated in-school, after school, and weekend programs in literacy training, personal skills development, community involvement, cultural heritage classes, and socially responsible art making. Students from this initiative have gone onto the most prestigious academic institutions in our nation, including the Julliard School, Howard University, and Wesleyan College.

Similarly, Sesame Flyers preserves the culture of Caribbean communities through dance and art but also provides a safe place for children for academic tutoring, cultural awareness, youth-led community service activities, job readiness, and provides families with counseling and adult GED programs. Last year, over 7,000 individuals walked through the doors of Sesame Flyers to benefit from their programs.

These organizations are real brick-and-mortar institutions in my district, whose missions are consistent with progressive values - giving disadvantaged New Yorkers an opportunity to succeed or hold onto what little they have. They are not special interests, but vital lifelines for my constituents. At a time when the economy is stagnant, and your budgets have cut social services to the bone, non-profits are struggling to pick up the slack. \$30,000 for three organizations may seem like a small amount in the context of a \$132 billion budget, and it is – but these are large amounts to small organizations struggling to meet increasing service needs.

Contrary to your veto message, the funding to these organizations is not "a new appropriation," these monies in fact have already been appropriated in prior budgets. In my district, \$30,000 was previously appropriated and allocated to an organization which subsequently became inactive, and therefore that money was reallocated to the three organizations mentioned above.

Thus, the designation of "reappropriation" by the Legislature is accurate and appropriate. The the State of New York did not authorize the appropriation of any additional monies, and the usage of the term "reappropriation" is a historical practice and in fact was used by you in last year's budget.

For these reasons, I urge you to restore funding to these organizations that are providing critical services to my constituents during this time of great economic adversity. I look forward to a favorable response to this request.

Yours in Partnership,



KEVIN PARKER

cc: Ifetayo
Sesame Flyers
Erasmus