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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

June 23, 2021

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Corey Johnson
Speaker, New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Johnson:

Thank you for the opportunity to share this statement of outstanding budget issues for priority in the Fiscal Year 2022 Adopted Budget.

Although New York City and New York State are rapidly reopening, many city residents, business owners, and nonprofit institutions are still experiencing unprecedented economic distress resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. While appreciative of the hard-fought federal stimulus pandemic relief funds that are critical to our recovery, we must be equally focused and transparent on how these funds are spent. I am especially concerned about the substantial sum earmarked for the New York City Department of Education (DOE). In addition, we must identify which stakeholders are not being served by these funds – whether they be small cultural institutions that provide free or low-cost educational programming or minority and women owned restaurants – and rectify these gaps. As a member of the New York Forward Reopening Advisory Board and the NYC Regional Control Room, I will continue to work with all sectors to find concrete ways to move Manhattan and New York City forward.

In January 2021, I formed a Manhattan Vaccine Task Force to improve local implementation of the City and State's vaccination efforts and ensure equity in healthcare outcomes. The Task Force is composed of community-based organizations, volunteer groups, elected officials, Community Board chairs, and other stakeholders from across the borough with on-the-ground knowledge of all of Manhattan's communities. With increased vaccine availability, the Task Force expanded its focus to address Recovery and Reopening. Topics included City funding in the American Rescue Plan, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Broadway and cultural institutions, the hospitality industry, food access and insecurity, tourism, and fall plans for returning K-12 and higher education students to in-person instruction.

Every budgetary investment in education, health, public safety, resiliency, and infrastructure defines the narrative of our goals and priorities for the future of our city. Whereas I might address a wide range of policy challenges and solutions, I will focus my comments on areas where this budget can be improved. Now more than ever we must be wise in our course of action and ensure that our budget reflects the progressive agendas we have fought for.

Community Boards

In this regard, I want to note that Community Boards are not just a place where local residents file complaints about noise, street repaving, and sidewalk cafes; they serve as key partners in helping the City to better understand local agency needs, review applications for neighborhood development, and provide important information to their constituencies on behalf of elected officials, non-profits, and small businesses. Alongside a handful of professional staff members, Community Boards are run by dedicated volunteers who are invested in their neighborhoods and in our city. Our commitment must match theirs.

Each of the City's 59 Community Boards has had its budget reduced by \$12,000 over the past year, including the 12 located in Manhattan.¹ The total amount of proposed cuts for Community Boards in the FY22 Executive Budget is \$481,027 – hardly a dent in budget savings but deeply hurtful to Community Boards. At a time where Community Boards will be imperative in getting the pulse of what is needed towards the recovery of our City, we must ensure they have the resources needed. I am recommending that while Community Boards actually need more funding to better carry out their functions, at a minimum they should be held harmless and the \$12,000 cut should be restored.

Department of Education

School Based Social Workers

There are many benefits to having full-time social workers anchored to and in service to individual school communities. Children are shouldering the mental health burdens and conflicts stemming from the virus. They face an even greater upheaval of their day to day lives than adults. Ensuring that students, families, and educators have an onsite resource to address their mental health needs is critical to creating an environment where learning can happen effectively. Social workers are mental health professionals who are trained to address those issues – and they can help relieve the pressures on already overworked educators and staff.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recommends a ratio of one social worker per 250 general education students in each school building. While the DOE reports adhering to a 1:215 social worker to student ratio, it also reports that it has 304 social workers serving more than one school building. School Response Clinicians can be assigned to as many as 10 schools and dispatched to still others when a crisis arises, severely limiting their time with the students at any one school. New York City should establish a baseline of services by funding one full-time school-based social worker per school. I am appreciative of the partnership with Speaker Johnson, Finance Chair Dromm and Education Chair Treyger each year in budgetary gains toward this goal.

¹ All Community Boards had their budgets cut by \$3,628 in FY21 and were asked to further identify \$8,153 in cuts for FY22, totaling \$11,781 per Community Board.

It would cost approximately \$85 million to bring a full-time social worker into every school in Districts 1-32 and 75. Adding this funding to the FY22 Adopted Budget would allow schools to begin the hiring process to be prepared for the upcoming school year. I support the Administration's Executive Budget plan to add 500 school-based social workers for the next school year (2021-2022). However, even with this planned increase and assuming the additional worker is full-time, according to a recent analysis by the Independent Budget Office, the school system would still need a further increase of 75 full-time-equivalent social worker positions to bring at least one full-time social worker to every school.

Community Schools

Under this initiative, it is of utmost importance to ensure that the community schools provide one-stop shopping for education, social services, and health services. Constructing partnerships with community-based organizations that have such a capacity will not only boost the effectiveness of community schools, but also allow for the diversification of funding. Funding of about \$450,000 per community school is necessary for this proven model to provide all of the support needed to the school community.

It is very concerning that the Administration added only \$10.8 million to the FY22 Executive Budget to create 27 new community schools, since the Office of Community Schools (OCS) anticipates that the CBO contracts will total \$12.2 million (\$450K per school). According to OCS, an additional \$800,000 is also needed to fund staffing and Other than Personnel Services (OTPS). The Administration should fully fund the \$13 million program by adding an additional \$2.2 million. Lastly, a cohesive plan should be made public as to how the proposed expansion of the 2021 Mental Health and Well-Being Plan is being implemented. It calls for the eventual opening of 100 new community schools at a cost of approximately \$33 million for the additional 73 schools. They need to be sustainably funded in subsequent years.

Expand Restorative Justice Practices

According to Civil Rights Data for New York City public schools, Black and Latinx students make up over 91% of the referrals of students to law enforcement. A closer analysis of this number reveals that 52% of these referrals are of Black students, a number that is particularly alarming given the fact that they make up only 23% of the total public school population. Black students are 12 times more likely to be expelled from school than their White peers and almost 10 times more likely to be suspended. Research indicates that, controlling for a number of other relevant factors, suspensions account for approximately 20% of the differences in quantitative student achievement metrics between White students and Black students.² Additionally, similar research says students who get suspended only once throughout their academic trajectory are twice as likely to drop out of school, 44% less likely to graduate, and 49% less likely to attend a post-secondary institution.³ Proactively replacing exclusionary punitive discipline with restorative justice practices can positively impact these data points.

Adding \$53.3 million to the FY22 budget will help school leaders be more creative in holistically training and utilizing existing staff to help build restorative practices into the fabric of school culture.

²https://www.academia.edu/23082745/The_Punishment_Gap_School_Suspension_and_Racial_Disparities_in_Achievement

³<https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1217&context=childrenatrisk>

Extend Family and Community Engagement

The FY22 budget should include a \$13.4 million allocation for comprehensive family and community engagement practices, allocated for:

\$7.8 million at the district level for district coordinator, facilitator(s), district programs, and services. District funds may support training, grants to schools, the dissemination of effective practices, and other district leadership functions to assist all schools to develop expertise and programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

\$5.6 million at the school level to support family and community involvement activities planned by the school's Action Team for Partnerships. Each school's program should include activities for the six types of involvement:

“Parenting” – helping families create healthy home environments for their children

“Communicating” – school-to-home as well as home-to-school methods for effective communication, not only about school programs but also about their children's progress

“Volunteering” – organizing parent support

“Learning at Home” – providing information and resources to families in order to support learning at home, as well as to engage families in learning activities that take place outside of the typical school day

“Decision-Making” – including parents in school decisions and creating spaces where parents and community members can serve as leaders and representatives

“Collaborating with the Community” – integrating services from the community to fortify programs, family practices, and student learning

These activities should be tailored to meet school goals and involve all families. School funds may be used to support a part-time site-based coordinator, printed materials, refreshments, incentives, workshop presenters, website development, and other involvement activities.

Devices for All Students

DOE should routinely equip all upper-grade students and teachers with personal computing devices. Remote instruction will likely continue to be used by public schools after the pandemic in many different formats. It can be an important tool to provide access to resources such as advanced coursework and college-credit-bearing coursework. Additionally, the 2021 Student Achievement Plan is centered on digital curricular resources.

Based on 2020-2021 NYC DOE Student Enrollment Data, purchasing approximately 163,000 digital devices every year over the next three years for a total cost of \$388 million would provide each student in the 6th to 12th grade with a device.

Baseline Remediation Programs

CUNY's Remediation Programs support students by helping them move more quickly into credit bearing coursework. In FY21, the Adopted Budget added \$1.7 million for the program. The

FY22 Adopted Budget should add and baseline \$2 million to pilot a new version of remediation programs that explore avenues for cohesive partnerships between community colleges and high schools for transitional coursework.

Transitional courses would be available to all high school seniors who meet the state standard for high school graduation in math and ELA, but are not considered “college ready.” Instead of taking remedial courses after matriculating, qualified high school seniors would take specifically designed transitional courses with the promise of taking credit-bearing coursework upon matriculating into CUNY if they pass.

Child Care

The FY22 Executive Budget expands 3-K for All by 16,500 seats but makes no significant increase in Full-Day/Year-Round Programs that serve infants and toddlers as well as full-day of care and summer services for three and four-year old children. In addition, due to the redistribution of services, many longstanding community-based organizations that primarily serve low-income communities and communities of color will only be able to provide school-day/school-year programs. New York City cannot recover from the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic by imposing the further burden of unobtainable quality child care on working families.

NYC Pre-K data shows that only 16% of all four-year-olds received full-day/year-round care while the remaining 84% were in school day/year programs. Meanwhile, many family child care providers who provide full-day care and the bulk of care for the youngest children, were recently awarded DOE contracts for only school-day care for three-year-olds.

I join the City Council’s call for the Adopted Budget to include \$45 million to expand childcare services “to ensure that full time, year-round childcare is available to families who need it the most.” This investment is an absolute necessity.

Department for the Aging

I want to start by sharing a heartfelt thank you to the wonderful staff of our City’s senior centers, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) and settlement houses as well as organizations like LiveOn NY, United Neighborhood Houses, UJA Federation of NY, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Citymeals on Wheels and AARP New York for their dedication in the face of unprecedented challenges to existing senior services. They are ESSENTIAL to our city’s older adults – many of whom did not have a senior center affiliation before this crisis. They serve as a lifeline to basic needs, a comfort after isolation, fearless advocacy, and offer innovation in engagement through technology, the arts, conversation, and movement. With the knowledge of how this pandemic is challenging older adults, caregivers and the non-profit agencies, *and* that older adults represent an increasing 20% of the city’s population, it’s untenable that the Department for the Aging (DFTA) budget remains at less than ½ of 1% of the City budget.

Therefore, we must advocate for the resources that are needed while also ensuring that New York City continues to be a great place to age. These funding priorities include: \$16.6 million for the home-delivered meals program; \$4.4 million for addressing the digital divide with improved senior center technology infrastructure and individual access; \$5.89 million to better connect

older adults with services to support aging in place; \$48 million cost of living adjustment (COLA) for essential human services workers, along with an additional \$1.7 million to achieve salary parity for NORC staff.

Each year the Council invests more than \$20 million in discretionary funds for essential senior services including Support Our Seniors, Immigrant Senior Centers, Geriatric Mental Health, NORCs, the Healthy Aging Initiative, and the wonderful SU-CASA arts program. These programs continue to support older adults, especially with the reopening of site-based indoor and outdoor activities. I encourage that the Adopted Budget fully fund these programs and for the Council to continue supporting them in this next fiscal year.

Department of Small Business Services

New York City's small business community has spent the last year fighting for survival. Throughout the pandemic, business owners suffered from mandatory shutdowns, reduced capacity, rent negotiations, and more. In September 2020, I released a Broadway Storefront Vacancy report that found 335 vacancies along Broadway from the Battery to Inwood. This number represented a 78% increase in vacancies from a similar study my office conducted in 2017. While we wait for the Department of Finance to release the mandated address-specific vacancy data for the entire city, we know that this trend is not limited to Broadway or Manhattan.

As we look forward to the COVID-19 economic recovery effort, we need to prioritize supporting our small businesses. Our small businesses are what set New York City apart by providing services and jobs in the community as well as attracting visitors from the surrounding area and around the globe. The proposed FY22 budget for the Department of Small Business Services totals \$317.6 million, a \$137.3 million increase from FY21. This is a good start, but the Adopted Budget needs to further invest in direct services that are easily accessible to business owners.

The Executive Budget calls for a Small Business Recovery Tax Credit that provides small businesses \$50 million in tax credits capped at \$10,000 per business. This program is an effective method to provide immediate financial relief to our small business owners and allow them to reallocate funds to paying down debts accrued over the past year or for bringing back staff. But \$10,000 is not adequate support for most businesses. Thousands of businesses have been unable to get any support during the pandemic, and many of them are behind on rent payments. This is an even greater concern in high-rent areas such as midtown Manhattan that suffered from a severe loss of commuter business. The City should expand this program to \$125 million and increase the cap to ensure we don't lose even more businesses.

For decades, one of our small businesses' crucial needs has been lack of access to legal services. COVID-19 has only made this need more pronounced and immediate. Over the past year, many small business owners faced hard decisions about rent payments while the courts were closed. Since its launch in 2018, the Commercial Lease Assistance Program successfully tackled this need, providing pre-litigation services to an average of 400 small businesses each year. Despite its effectiveness and praise by elected officials, owners and small business advocates, the program was eliminated in the FY21 Adopted Budget. We should not be scrounging for money to keep the program going every year, especially in the aftermath of a pandemic when these services are needed by so many businesses. The City should reinstate, expand, and baseline this program with \$3.5 million in the Adopted Budget to increase staff, capacity, and outreach.

Due to pandemic budget constraints, the New York City Economic Development Corporation suspended the Graffiti Free NYC program. This \$3.1 million program annually removed graffiti from 10,000-14,000 sites along some of our most popular commercial corridors. During the pandemic and the protests of 2020, graffiti has become more present on our vacant storefronts. We need to reinstate this program as we look to fill these commercial spaces and welcome back commuters and tourists.

Department of Cultural Affairs

We must not forget how critical it is to support our artists. New Yorkers found support in books, music, film, and other great works of art as they endured months of self-isolation during the pandemic. As a global center of music, dance, theater, and the visual arts, our artists and cultural institutions are key to our city's economic recovery. They are destinations for residents and visitors who patronize neighborhood restaurants, bars, and other businesses. They are also an essential – and mandated – component of K-12 education, imbuing students with the love of learning, and self-confidence; strengthening social emotional skills; improving academic outcomes; and cultivating a life-long appreciation of the arts.

I join the Council in advocating that the Administration restore \$20.2 million for funding to support cultural organizations in FY22. This funding supports the Cultural Institution Groups, increases to all Cultural Development Fund recipients, COVID-19 relief, arts education and impact grants, and funding for energy grants.

The Shuttered Venues Operator Grant is a great start but will help under ten percent of the creative economy since it doesn't assist performers or ancillary industries like costumers, set designers, and ushers. For the city's cultural organizations, there are gaps in the funding eligibility for federal programs including cultural institutions that provide free or low-cost programming within our schools and neighborhoods. The Administration should invest federal stimulus dollars – including the significant amount being directed to the New York City Department of Education – in these institutions that need assistance to pay back debt and reopen.

Department of Sanitation

The FY22 Executive Budget allocation for the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) is \$1.83 billion, which is \$54.7 million or 3% more than the FY21 Adopted Budget. A notable difference between the two budgets is the removal of all emergency food funding for DSNY in FY22. The FY22 Executive Budget also includes \$509.1 million of federal stimulus funding for yet-to-be-determined DSNY services,⁴ yet this amount is presented not as additional funding but is budgeted to be used in place of the City's tax levy funding in the same amount.

Litter Basket Pickup

The pandemic has impacted the operation of DSNY programs, including those that were deemed essential services. A top concern that my office repeatedly heard about was the deterioration of street cleanliness due to the reduction of basket pickup services. Mayor de Blasio announced the Precision Cleaning Initiative on March 31, 2021 in which 100 trucks dedicated to litter basket service would be added, increasing basket collection service level by 61% since July 2020. I later

⁴ According to NYC Council Finance, when New York City received American Rescue Plan stimulus funds from the federal government, OMB allocated the \$509.1 million to DSNY.

learned from DSNY staff at a Manhattan Borough Service Cabinet meeting that only some of the 100 trucks would be deployed in Manhattan to increase litter basket collection in a handful of targeted neighborhoods, and that trucks are deployed only upon field observation. The city needs more than 100 trucks to meet the goals of the litter basket program.

The FY22 Adopted Budget should allocate resources to increase overall street cleaning services citywide, such as restoring litter basket collection to pre-pandemic levels in all neighborhoods, including extra trash pickups in rat mitigation zones. This means closing a gap of \$8.6 million to bring litter basket services back to FY20 level that is not currently reflected in the FY22 Executive Budget. As New York City looks ahead toward recovery, I call for an allocation of at least \$17 million to fully fund litter basket, street sweeping, rat mitigation, syringe collection, and other waste pickup services.

Recycling and Organics Collection

On April 22, 2021, Mayor de Blasio announced the restoration of curbside organics collection, school-based organics collection, and community drop-off sites that were suspended due to the pandemic. The FY22 Executive Budget has allocated \$30.5 million to restore curbside organics collection, school organics collection, organics drop-off sites, and leaf and yard waste collection. While the restoration is a step in the right direction, I along with sustainability advocates have expressed concern that the restoration is only for neighborhoods where curbside organics collection was previously available, and that the only “expansion” is for buildings in those neighborhoods to opt in to be added for collection.

It is well known that New York City’s organics collection program operates on a deficit and requires large-scale implementation, with high levels of resident participation, to turn it profitable. For this reason, New York City needs to get to mandatory citywide organics collection sooner rather than later. With \$509.1 million in federal stimulus funding available for DSNY programs, I strongly urge the Administration to dedicate the full level of resources needed to properly build out a citywide organics collection program. This is a one-time investment that will lead to future years of fiscal and environmental benefits.

In addition to developing the infrastructure and capacity to roll out citywide organics collection, DSNY must have sufficient funding for waste prevention communication and outreach. Data shared on May 13, 2021 by DSNY’s Bureau of Recycling and Sustainability with my office shows \$9.65 million allocated in FY22 for communication and outreach for recycling, composting, waste reduction and reuse, including \$5.6 million in new funding for curbside composting outreach and communication. As I mentioned above, the Administration has the opportunity to allocate stimulus money to implement citywide organics collection in FY22. To ensure high rates of participation, the budget for organics collection outreach and communication must also be increased accordingly to allow for DSNY to conduct multiple rounds of mailers and print/electronic communication to all New York City households, as well as to allocate funds to support community-based organizations in their efforts to provide information and education in their communities.

We all know that federal stimulus support is a one-time opportunity. Taking the organics collection program past the hurdle of deficit due to partial implementation is a one-time need. By matching the resource to the need, all New Yorkers will have the opportunity to deposit their food and yard wastes for curbside pickup in FY22.

Commercial Waste Zone Initiative Rollout

Throughout the city, but particularly in core Manhattan, the pandemic has changed the way companies and commercial tenants use retail and office spaces. The decreased occupancy level of commercial buildings and the corresponding level of waste that these buildings will generate must be a guiding consideration as the Commercial Waste Zone (CWZ) program begins to operationalize. The FY22 Executive Budget has allocated \$3.96 million to fully fund the CWZ initiative's planning and implementation. I support this amount – and more to conduct updated assessments in light of COVID-19 – ahead of the program's rollout. CWZ program design should be flexible enough to meet current needs and with room to adapt and expand as core Manhattan and other parts of the city emerge into increased activities post-pandemic.

Department of Health

Neighborhood Health Centers

A critical lesson from the pandemic is how pre-existing disparities in access to preventative and treatment health services can have disastrous effects in a crisis. I support the Council's call to invest \$9.4 million to double the number of Neighborhood Action Centers across the city. The staff at these centers, located in Brownsville, East Harlem, and Tremont, work together with neighborhood community-based organizations, city agencies, health care providers, and community members of all ages to provide life-saving resources and programs.

Animal Care Centers of NYC

The Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) facility in Manhattan, located at 326 East 110th Street, is in dire need of a new, modern HVAC system and requests funding of \$1.4 million to replace the current HVAC and laundry systems. Specifically, this would replace three RTUs to provide indoor temperature control at the facility with 100% outside air and cover the cost of filings, electrical and duct work, and a gas line modification.

The current system is decades old, beyond its warranty and useful life, the controls are antiquated, and the refrigerant is outdated - failing frequently during the hottest and coldest days of the year. Over 250 animals can be housed daily at the Manhattan Care Center and pre-pandemic, over 200 staff and clients came through each day.

ACC is also in dire need of an upgrade to its current commercial washer and dryer system. They cycle through hundreds of pounds of laundry of animal bedding and towels used and washed daily for comfort and medical care. Only commercial grade equipment can handle the daily load of laundry that ACC produces.

ACC's staff is their greatest resource, yet the team of 225 staff has not had any COLA to salary since FY19. The lack of wage increases at ACC became particularly acute during the pandemic. Shelter staff were deemed essential, yet the funding did not allow a salary increase in recognition of what we can all agree was a very challenging and terrifying year to be working a public-facing job. A COLA adjustment in the amount of \$1,035,000 would allow ACC to address its turnover rate (40% on average) which frequently is driven by the low pay and difficulty of the work. Ensuring that wages reflect the skills needed to serve as NYC's only open admission animal sheltering organization would in the long run save money because the cost of rehiring and retraining is high and the process extensive.

ACC has over the years become more like a social service agency, specializing in the care of homeless animals, but also becoming a resource in NYC for people with animals in their lives. Much of ACC's work now addresses underserved communities not only where centers are located but throughout the city.

The pandemic has altered the need for ACC's services. In particular, there was a significant demand for free pet food and vet services during the pandemic. ACC provided over 100,000 pounds of free pet food to clients in need in 2020 and over 27,000 vaccines at their free vaccine clinics throughout the five boroughs.

With a restart of eviction proceedings, they expect a rapid increase in the need for their services related to animal surrender and surrender prevention resources. Additional expense funding in the amount of \$1 million would allow ACC to respond to the hardships faced by its clients by supporting additional clinics; pet food pantries; and animal behavior, enrichment and admissions services to help keep shelter animals healthy and owned animals from being surrendered because of economic hardship. The additional expense funding would also allow their budget the ability to absorb the rising cost of gasoline to operate ACC's fleet, and anticipated cost increases in medical supplies over the next year. ACC's current budget in the FY22 Executive Budget does not reflect any increase from the base budget set in FY19. In fact, ACC stands to receive less funding in FY22 than it has since FY19 should the City budget not include funding in addition to ACC's base budget for FY22.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this statement of outstanding budget issues for priority in the Fiscal Year 2022 Adopted Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gale A. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gale A. Brewer