

UNION SETTLEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
New York, New York
January 16, 2017

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UNION SETTLEMENT REPORT IDENTIFIES GLARING INEQUITIES IN FUNDING FOR NEW YORK CITY SENIOR CENTERS

*Some centers receive many times more funding per senior than other centers;
statistical analyses demonstrate that differences are not sufficiently explained by attendance,
occupancy costs or other possible factors*

Union Settlement (www.unionsettlement.org), the oldest and largest social service provider in East Harlem, today released a report demonstrating considerable inequities the funding provided by New York City to senior centers throughout the five boroughs. The report – entitled “*Separate and Unequal – An Analysis of Disparities in New York City Senior Center Funding*” – is based on data obtained from the New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA) for Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016).

Union Settlement operates four senior centers in East Harlem with vastly different funding levels, and decided to undertake the review to see if similar disparities exist citywide, out of concern about the potential adverse impact on seniors in underfunded centers. Union Settlement praised DFTA for its cooperation in providing the underlying data and its assistance in conducting some of the statistical analyses.

The report revealed startling disparities in senior center funding. For example:

- **Overall funding:** The contract for a senior center in Midwood, Brooklyn provided for just \$5.32 in funding per senior served per day, while the contract for another center in Jamaica, Queens was provided *more than nine times more* – \$50.31 per senior served per day.
- **Meal costs:** A senior center in Lower Manhattan received just \$3.54 per meal to feed seniors, while a different senior center in Borough Park, Brooklyn received *over five times more* – \$18.36 per meal.
- **Health promotion activities:** DFTA contractually requires senior centers to provide a specified number of “units” of Health Promotion (HPR) activities – i.e., health management, physical health/exercise and nutrition education activities – and provides a specific dollar amount to cover the costs of offering

those activities. A senior center in Williamsburg, Brooklyn was contracted to receive \$0.11 per HPR unit, while the contract for a senior center in the Morris Heights area of the Bronx called for *465 times more* funding – \$51.16 per unit.

Union Settlement then took the raw data and conducted a series of statistical analyses to determine if the disparities could be explained by logically relevant variables – for example, whether the variation in total funding could be explained by the number of seniors who attend a senior center, or whether the number of meals served could explain the variations in food budgets.

However, the analyses showed that the service variables explained a surprisingly small portion of the variations in funding offered for those services. For example, the number of seniors expected to attend a center explained only 25% of the variation in the amount of funding provided to the center, and the number of meals to be offered at a senior center explained only 49% of the variation in the amount of funding designated to cover the cost of the meals.

“The level of inequality in the funding of senior centers is very troubling,” said David Nocenti, Executive Director of Union Settlement. “Every senior deserves to be treated fairly and equitably, and the quality of their senior center shouldn’t depend on where they happen to live. We need to abolish the current “separate and unequal” funding system, which leaves some seniors languishing in woefully underfunded centers, and establish a new system under which all seniors are treated equally.”

The senior center funding disparities are believed to have existed for decades, and Union Settlement’s report calls for both immediate and long-term corrective actions:

- First, the City should immediately increase the budgets of the underfunded senior centers to bring them up to the current median spending level citywide, which will eliminate the most egregious inequities that currently exist.
- Second, the City should convene a Fair Senior Funding Working Group of senior center providers, private funders and academic experts to work with DFTA to determine how much it costs to provide a high quality senior center program.
- Finally, the City should adopt a new funding formula, to go into effect next fiscal year, under which every senior center receives the same amount of programmatic spending per senior, with separate payments for fixed costs like rent, and an agreed-upon adjustment to account for economies of scale.

“Senior centers are vital to the health and well-being of tens of thousands of elderly New Yorkers, providing nutritious meals and opportunities for physical activity, socialization, educational programming and many other services,” said Mr. Nocenti. “I want to thank DFTA for its cooperation during our investigation, and believe that the current administration is committed to ensuring that appropriate and equitable levels of funding are provided to every

center throughout the city. Hopefully that goal can be achieved in next year's budget. Our seniors deserve no less."

The full "*Separate and Unequal*" report is available [here](#).

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About Union Settlement

Union Settlement is an on-the-ground resource for East Harlem residents of all ages, and a passionate advocate for the needs of underserved communities. Since opening our doors in 1895, we have brought education, wellness and community-building programs to our neighborhood, empowering New Yorkers with opportunities to better their lives. With a staff of more than 350 and services that impact 10,000 people, Union Settlement is building the vitality and success of East Harlem. For more information visit www.unionsettlement.org.