



**COMMENTS FOR THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES
& COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Roundtable Discussion on Human Services
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I am Sierra Stoneman-Bell, Co-Director of the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC). I offer comments today on behalf of the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce on the potential impact of changes to the GED exam and state policies regarding pathways to a high school equivalency diploma. I would like to thank Committee Chairs Gallivan and Savino, for holding this important forum and for the opportunity to offer this statement.

As part of its work advocating for quality youth services in New York City, Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC) helps lead the **Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW)**, a coalition of more than 40 organizations dedicated to advancing policy solutions to reconnect young adults to education and careers. Recognizing the GED as a priority issue for youth and adults, CTW launched a campaign in 2010 to build support for improving opportunities for adult learners to earn a high school equivalency diploma. CTW's recommendations reflect the input of a broad group of adult literacy provider organizations from New York City's multiple delivery systems (including NYC DOE, CUNY, SUNY, community-based organizations, and public libraries).

While state policy regarding high school equivalency credentials falls under the State Education Department (NYSED), it has great impact on the human services sector as **there are 2.8 million adults in the state who are out of school and lack a high school credential**. Many of these New Yorkers rely on human services organizations to develop their skills, continue their education, and prepare for the workforce. For those who left high school without a diploma, the test of General Educational Development (GED) has been an important gateway to postsecondary education and professional advancement. The workforce development and adult literacy systems rely heavily on the GED as a milestone of progress.

In recent years, **budget cuts have threatened GED testing and adult literacy programs**, with a dangerous disruption of state funding for GED testing centers occurring in 2010. There are new changes underway to the GED exam itself which have serious implications for students, educators, and all organizations supporting people to reach their educational and employment goals. The State Legislature has an important role in ensuring that New Yorkers have access to educational pathways. A strong second chance system is crucial for New York's human capital development and our economic recovery.

There will be a new GED exam in 2014, which will be more difficult and more expensive. The GED Testing Service is developing the new exam to be aligned with the Common Core Standards to indicate college and career readiness. This sets a higher bar for adult learners before the Common Core is even implemented in the K-12 system. Assuming current adult education investment and capacity, a more

difficult GED test will likely reduce the number of testers who pass the test, also impacting the workforce system which relies on the GED as a key outcome.

The GED exam will be moving to a computer-based test, and it is predicted to cost at least twice as much as it does now. Currently, with a NYSED budget line of \$2.86 million, New York administers roughly 50,000 GED exams each year, with many people waiting for months to take the test. The GED Testing Service has not yet released cost information for the new GED test; best estimates are based on current pricing of \$120 per battery of tests for Computer-Based Testing. Using this as a rough guide, the current state budget would only pay for testing for *half* the number of people. This warns of a severe contraction of educational opportunity at a time when people most need options to get ahead.

At the same time, **the GED recently became a for-profit operation.** The American Council on Education, the national non-profit organization that has developed/administered the GED for decades, partnered with Pearson to turn the GED Testing Service into a for-profit entity. This raises further questions and concerns related to cost, access, instruction, and the interplay with state education policies.

Most states use the GED test as a tool to assess and award high school equivalency credentials. In New York, **passing the GED test is the most common but not the only way to earn a high school equivalency diploma.** NYSED and practitioner-led groups have started exploring other pathways that could be strengthened or implemented to lessen the State's reliance on the GED test. These efforts should be actively supported, while the State also prepares for the fast-approaching challenges of the new GED test.

CTW makes the following recommendations to sustain current funding for GED testing and support multiple pathways to a high school equivalency diploma.

1. **Maintain current funding for GED testing and preparation,** including GED test centers, Adult Literacy Education (ALE), and Employment Preparation Education (EPE). It is critical that basic funding for preparation programs and GED testing operations be maintained, especially as there will be a surge in testers looking to pass before the exam changes in 2014.
2. **Maintain free access to the GED exam.** The focus should be on increasing the *number* of people who take and pass the GED. Policies that create more barriers should be resisted. CTW opposes proposals to begin charging a fee to GED test-takers and transfer the cost burden to those who can least afford it, especially considering that the GED Testing Service is now for-profit. CTW also opposes mandated readiness screening for test-takers given the limited overall capacity to prepare all those who need it.
3. **Develop alternative pathways to a high school equivalency diploma.** In light of the coming changes to the GED exam, New York must pursue additional avenues for people to earn high school equivalency credentials. CTW is pleased that NYSED is beginning this process now, and we urge legislative support for efforts to explore, strengthen, and develop multiple pathways to earn a high school equivalency diploma in New York State.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments. We look forward to working with members of the Committees to advocate for a stronger set of pathways to a NYS high school equivalency diploma.

CTW is coordinated by the Community Services Society (CSS), Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC), and United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). For more information, contact Lazar Treschan: 212-614-5396, ltreschan@cssny.org; Sierra Stoneman-Bell: 212-619-1666, sierra@nfsc-nyc.org; or Kevin Douglas: 212-967-0322 x345, kdouglas@unhny.org.
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