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Testimony to the Committees on Youth Services and Finance
of the Council of the City of New York
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Issue: Implementation of the “Young Men’s Initiative”

Recommendation: Greater transparency and community engagement, continued expansion of the YMI into other related areas

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Young Men’s Initiative. My name is Lazar Treschan and I am the Director of Youth Policy for The Community Service Society of New York (CSS), an organization that has played a leadership role in bringing attention to the plight of out of school, out of work young adults in New York City. Beginning with the work of Mark Levitan, we identified the crisis of “disconnected youth” in 2005, and have continued to seek investment in his population. I have published recent reports about Latino youth and young people on public assistance that also seek to bring attention to this issue. Along with United Neighborhood Houses and Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, I am also the co-coordinator of the Campaign for Tomorrow’s Workforce (CTW) a coalition of organizations that advocates for increased and improved investment in programs for out of school, out of work young adults. It is through the CTW that we hear the important voices of the service provider organizations that are doing the daily hard work of reconnecting young adults to school and work.

The Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) is a positive step for New York City. It is important to bring attention to the challenges that young men of color in New York City

are facing in a variety of areas, and the YMI has done that. In my testimony, I will briefly discuss the substance of the YMI, but will focus on the process of development, rollout, and implementation of the initiative.

The administration reports that the YMI consists of nearly \$130 million in investment, over three years, in improving educational, employment, criminal justice, and health-related outcomes for young men of color. This is a great investment that will bring even greater returns to New York City. It would be great to have better clarity about the extent to which this funding represents new investments. In a list of YMI initiatives on the City's website, www.nyc.gov, most of the programs in the YMI are described as "expansions". While we believe that it is good policy to build off of existing efforts, it would be good to have a better idea of the amount of funds that continue strong programs such as the Young Adult Internship Program and the Young Adult Literacy Program, and what portion of the announced funding actually increases or expands those programs beyond their existing levels. It would also be good to know the amount of new investment to these and other programs that does not include grants, such as the Social Innovation Fund, that New York City received long before the announcement of the YMI.

It would be also be helpful to know how the decisions about new investments were made. The population of young men in New York City is extremely diverse, and it is important to match our investments to the needs faced by different segments of the population. We know that the mayoral administration, and the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in particular, has strong research and analysis capacity; they should

use this to ensure that our public investments are made in proportion to the needs faced by the key sub-populations.

The Community Service Society, in partnership with the Fiscal Policy Institute, is currently working on a project to better understand the diversity of the young adult population in New York City, particularly those who are out of school and out of work. From our initial and previous analyses, it appears to me that the YMI could do more to invest in young adults with the greatest needs. There is a substantial population in New York City of young adults who are out of school, out of work, and with extremely low skills. (Youth Committee Chair Fidler calls these the “militant” disconnected youth.) The service provider organizations that we work with speak very strongly about the need for greater resources to serve these young people, who are flooding their programs. Both CSS and our CTW coalition have stated, before this committee and in meetings with the administration and DYCD that this population faces a dearth of resources to help this sub-group reconnect. The few existing resources that could be used to target them are often unfortunately steered away from them. This is the case with the Out-of-School Youth (OSY) program at DYCD, which is more vocational in nature than what is encouraged by federal and state policy, and the welfare-to-work programming in the Human Resources Administration, which discourages young adults on public assistance from completing their educations as part of their PA work requirement, also despite federal and state guidance to the contrary.

While the investments in the YMI will help many young people, it would have been beneficial to see more of an emphasis on the young people with the greatest needs. Much of the YMI invests in in-school youth. The greatest investments for out of school

youth are in the YAIP program, which includes no educational component. There is investment to increase the Young Adult Literacy Program, which is excellent, but these funds are nowhere near the need. The other employment investments, the Jobs Plus effort in public housing developments and increased services at SBS Workforce1 Career Centers, are not targeted toward young adults – they are universal programs – nor do they contain intensive educational components.

There are ways to improve the YMI as it is implemented. First, it should incorporate the strong efforts of the City Council, CSS, and others, to reform services to young adults on public assistance. Young people ages 16 to 24 on PA should be encouraged to get their GED. The YMI rightly recognizes the 16 to 24 age group as a key developmental period, but the Human Resources Administration (HRA) continues to argue that anyone over age 19 should be treated as an adult and should not even be allowed (much less encouraged) to get their GED as part of their work requirement. As they currently stand, these policies run counter to each other.

The YMI should also work with DYCD to improve the OSY program so that it can better serve young people without high school diplomas. OSY represents millions of dollars in federal funding that could be serving our neediest youth, yet it is incentivized to serve our most job-ready youth. This should change.

The YMI should also be an internal advocacy voice for young adult investments within the administration. It is great to see YMI investments on the one hand, but sad to see the massive cuts to summer youth employment and adult literacy (which serve many young adults who have not completed high school) at the same time (not to mention cuts to Beacons and OST programs for youth). The YMI investments are diluted if the city

budget continually cuts youth programs in other areas. The YMI should ensure that literacy and youth employment from other city funding sources are maintained.

Lastly, we should broaden the voices that are a part of the continued YMI development and implementation. So many stakeholders have been working in this field for many years, and the administration should consider developing a broader YMI advisory network that would include advocacy groups such as the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce and many others.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.