



**New York State Senate and Assembly**

**February 5, 2014**

**Public Hearing on Human Services**

**Testimony of Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty**

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### **About Met Council**

Since its inception in 1972, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) has been a defender and advocate for New Yorkers in need. Met Council is also the voice of the Jewish poor and the first line of defense for our community's needy. We fight poverty through comprehensive social services and treat every individual with dignity and respect. Our grassroots Jewish Community Council network strengthens families and neighborhoods throughout New York City.

### **Met Council's Social Service Model Has a Proven Track Record**

Met Council's broad continuum of anti-poverty social services include: Crisis Services, Kosher Food Pantries, Family Violence Program, Benefits Access, Legal Services, Affordable Housing, Home Services, Home Care, and Capacity Building for small nonprofits. Services are delivered in a native language and in a culturally sensitive and dignified way and are designed to stabilize individuals and families while giving them appropriate tools for sustained self-sufficiency. Met Council's "no wrong door" policy ensures that no matter which point of entry clients use to access services, they will be assisted with all of their needs in order to solve the root of their problems. Programs are especially targeted to communities with a high concentration of working-poor and near-poor households, whose unmet needs are not fully addressed by government and other social service agencies because they hover just above the Federal Poverty threshold.

## **Response to the Proposed FY15 Budget**

Social services provided by Met Council are a lifeline for thousands of New Yorkers in need and the demand for these vital services continues to increase at a rapid rate. Newly-released Census Bureau figures for 2013 show that even as the recession has ended, New York City's poverty rate continues to increase, and the gap between the rich and poor remains stubbornly wide.

According to research conducted by Mark R. Rank, a professor of social welfare at Washington University, nearly 40 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 60 will experience at least one year below the official poverty line during that period (\$23,492 for a family of four), and 54 percent will spend a year in poverty or near poverty (below 150 percent of the poverty line). Put simply, poverty is a mainstream event experienced by a majority of Americans at some point in their lives.

Met Council does not need statistics to confirm what we see through first-hand experience at our food pantries, community-based sites, and through our crisis hotline, namely that poverty is increasing especially rapidly among working poor New Yorkers. One out of four New Yorkers are low-income and are finding that they can barely make it from month to month, while working as hard as they possibly can. Jewish Poverty in New York is subject to many of the same forces and continues to grow at an alarming rate as well. Presently, one in four New York City Jewish households is poor and one in ten is near-poor. In light of this downward trend, the need for emergency food and other comprehensive social services continues to increase dramatically. Met Council is strongly committed to getting the maximum leverage from our dollars and operating as efficiently as possible.

## **Hurricane Sandy**

As a Citywide agency with expertise in crisis intervention and with community based organizations in the hardest hit areas, Met Council became a leader on the ground in Hurricane Sandy relief and recovery efforts. We have been on the front-lines, providing vital social services, in Far Rockaway, Bayswater/Wavecrest, Belle Harbor, Coney Island, Seagate, Gravesend, Brighton Beach, and Staten Island. The proposed budget appropriates \$21 billion for disaster-related recovery. While we applaud the Governor for allocating funds to update the electrical grid, protect the coastlines, and strengthen the MTA and public transportation system, we believe that there should be more support dedicated to strengthening the network of nonprofit

providers who act as first responders in the time of disaster. **Nonprofit organizations like Met Council continue to play a vital role in long-term disaster relief efforts through programs such as case management, honest damage appraisal, mobile recovery units, etc. There is also a vital need for funds to be available to help those in the hardest hit areas to rebuild their homes and infrastructure. We hope to engage with the State and take an active role in the State's disaster preparedness planning efforts.**

Met Council is grateful for its partnership with the New York State Government through the following contracts:

- **Supported Housing with OMH-** This contract enables Met Council to operate several residential programs for mentally ill adults, many of whom are formerly homeless. The Metro House, Brooklyn Scattered Site and Abraham Residence all provide on-site case management, which includes developing and maintaining linkages to medical and mental health services, and government entitlements and community support services in accordance with individual needs.
  
- **Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program with the Department of Health-** This contract enables Met Council to provide 27 HPNAP eligible food pantries with a total of 1,750,000 meals to be distributed to hungry New Yorkers and allocates resources to HPNAP eligible food pantries.
  
- **Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program with OCFS-** This contract enables Met Council to educate teachers, parents, and children on protecting themselves from predators in a culturally sensitive way.

We deeply value your leadership and look forward to working together to help those in need throughout the New York area. Thank you.

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