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**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
In Support of Multi-Generational Education Program**

Elementary Education Budget Hearing

February 11, 2020

Presented by Gamileh Jamil

Dear Members of the Senate and the Assembly,

My name is Gamileh Jamil and I am the Upstate Director of Advocacy for the New York Immigration Coalition. On behalf of the New York Immigration Coalition, a statewide organization representing over 200 non-profit organizations who work with immigrant New Yorkers, we write to urge the inclusion of renewed and increased funding for Multi-Generational Education Programs in the FY 2021 New York State Budget, specifically by fully funding Foundation Aid and investing \$25 Million in Adult Literacy Education (ALE).

The NYIC has a long-standing history of convening community leaders from across NY's diverse communities at the grassroots level, advocates, and practitioners to advocate for immigrant learners. The NYIC has a distinguished track record of improving Multilingual Learners' and immigrant students' access to resources and working with the NY State Education Department to address barriers immigrants face. The NYIC member organizations specifically serve the needs of *marginalized immigrant communities* - including newly-arrived immigrants, low-income families, and youth and adults with limited English proficiency. We are also here on behalf of NY-AFFIRMs, a recently formed coalition

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that brings together New York State advocates for multilingual learners (MLLs), including educational, advocacy and community-based organizations, and educators from around the state to advocate for adequate resources to meet the educational needs of MLLs and their families. By leading NY-AFFIRMs, the NYIC is cultivating strategic collaborations that can effectively address the lack of adequate resources available to high needs school districts around the state tasked with serving our growing immigrant populations.

As active and committed immigrant rights groups and community-based organizations serving immigrant learners and their families in New York, we urge state leaders to fully fund the original Foundation Aid formula. We are gravely worried about education resource disparities, because we know first hand how inadequate resources have short-changed our English Language Learner communities.

Collectively, we implore the state to stop short-changing our immigrant communities and English language learners (ELLs), students who speak a language other than English at home and qualify to receive assistance to learn English at school. We are deeply concerned that the schools that serve our immigrant students have been disproportionately impacted by the decades-long failure to properly use the Foundation Aid formula, which has deprived New York's public schools of \$3.8 billion dollars. While the Foundation Aid formula was created to address resource disparities, 71% of the money owed is to school districts with 40% or more Black and Latinx, hamstringing districts in meeting their constitutional obligation to serve all students.

The Foundation Aid formula was created as a result of the 2006 Court of Appeals' decision in the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. The State of New York*, which found that the state's

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system for financing public education was unconstitutional. The state was then mandated to provide districts with an infusion of school aid dollars through a fair, transparent and predictable funding program that properly reflects the needs of students and taxpayers across the entire state. The Formula gives greater weight to account for the additional needs of ELLs, students with disabilities, and students in poverty. The formula was designed to provide sufficient and consistent funding — free of political manipulations — for public schools to deliver a sound and basic education to all students. Yet since 2011, instead of funding the original Foundation Aid formula, New York State substitutes politicized and temporary formulas that change from year to year and consistently leave our highest needs schools drastically underfunded. While the formula should be updated, immigrant-serving organizations want to ensure that the state fully funds the original formula now and establishes an expert panel to reassess the costs of successfully addressing the complex needs of immigrant learners and reflecting the population changes around the state.

The Foundation Aid formula is not only important to comprehensively serve New York's ELLs, but also, to capture the holistic needs of our immigrant communities. According to the Migration Policy Institute, nearly one in four New Yorkers is an immigrant, and two out of five school-age children have at least one or more foreign-born parents (August 2018). Moreover, immigrant families and ELLs are racially, economically, and academically diverse. ELLs represent 10% of the New York student population (NYSED MLL/ELL Demographic Report, 2018-2019) and speak more than 200 languages (NYS English Language Learners Home Languages 2015-2016 SY). Immigrant students often need English as a New Language (ENL) services, and may also need special education services and supports for economically disadvantaged families. As a result, the educational issues immigrant students face around



the state are as diverse as our immigrant populations and the Foundation Aid Formula is the only funding stream that holistically addresses them.

The success of our state is dependent on the educational achievement of our diverse communities. Consistent underfunding of the schools that serve immigrant students and families affects immigrants' capacity to fully participate and integrate in their communities, their access to economic empowerment, their likelihood to face homelessness or housing insecurities, and essentially impacts our overall quality of life. However, there are also immediate and detrimental impacts Statewide, only 38.9% of MLLs/ELLs graduate within four years compared to 85.5% of non-ELLs. Egregiously, they have the highest dropout rate of any subgroup at 27%. This situation stands in sharp contrast to ELLs' incredible potential. When ELLs receive the support they need to become proficient, they can outperform their native-speaking peers. To address long-standing achievement and opportunity gaps, New York State elected leaders must prioritize fully funding the Foundation Aid formula.

Along with our partners of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), we also ask the State to invest \$25 million to fund high-quality, community-based Adult Literacy Education. ALE is dramatically under funded in New York in spite of the fact that more than 3.5 million New Yorkers lack English language proficiency, a high school diploma, or both. Less than 4% of the need for adult literacy classes is currently being met. ALE is the only source of funding that requires at least 50% of students in community-based English classes be at the beginning levels of English literacy, a population that is deeply underserved by all other available funding. Recent changes to



federal funding have further emphasized employment requirements, keeping lower level students out of classes and exacerbating a problem that was already at a breaking point.

The NYIC and NYCCAL believe that being able to read and write, speak and understand English, obtain a high school or equivalency diploma, and successfully enter job training or post-secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker. Ensuring that parents get access to adult literacy improves the overall well-being of immigrant families. Individuals with literacy skills are better able to communicate with law enforcement and health professionals, better understand and engage in their children's education, and participate in the civic and social life of their communities. To make that vision a reality, we urge state leaders to invest in our adult learners.

We thank you for your time and attention to this testimony. For any follow up questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at gjamil@nyic.org.

Respectfully submitted,

The New York Immigration Coalition

