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Testimony of University Settlement before the New York City Council

Oversight - Protecting, Preserving and Supporting Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in New York City

> Committee on Aging, Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair

Submitted by Sofiya Pidzyraylo, Director of Village View NORC, University Settlement

June 4, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on protecting, preserving, and supporting Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) in New York City. My name is Sofiya Pidzyraylo, Director of Village View NORC at University Settlement, my testimony will focus on the important supportive service programs that NORCs provide for older New Yorkers.

University Settlement is one of New York City's most dynamic social justice institutions, with an impressive legacy as the first settlement house in the nation. For 138 years, University Settlement has been an anchor in the immigrant communities with low income where we work, offering pioneering programs in early childhood care and education, youth development, eviction prevention, literacy, theater and visual arts, older adult services, and mental health. Each year, we engage over 40,000 New Yorkers through our network of 30+ sites in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Our mission is to empower residents by building on their strengths and knowledge through comprehensive, quality services that meet the current needs of the community, innovation that anticipates future needs, and advocacy on behalf of the community and its residents.

First, I would like to thank the City Council for its ongoing support for NORCs. Because of your enthusiasm for this program, we have been able to bring resources and attention to the needs of a large and rapidly growing older adult population. Additionally, without the NORC Initiative, there would be no City-funding directly allocated to support Neighborhood NORCs, which provide services in areas of the City with buildings under six-stories tall.



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Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) are multi-age housing developments or neighborhoods, respectively, that were not originally developed for older adults, but are now home to a significant number of older people. They were founded with the goal of transforming residential complexes and neighborhoods to meet the needs of a growing cohort of older residents and enable them to remain living independently in their homes, thrive in their communities, and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement.

The density of older adults and their proximity to each other further fosters creative approaches to providing health and social services. NORC programs provide case management services; nursing services; recreational, social and cultural activities, and ancillary services tailored to meet the needs of each community. Programs actively encourage healthy aging by providing access to health care, promoting health and wellness activities, addressing disease prevention, and responding to chronic health conditions. NORC staff provide wellness checks to address mental health and social isolation; assist seniors in accessing food and other supplies, and coordinate services.

University Settlement Village View NORC, generously funded by NYC Aging and New York State Office for the Aging, offers a robust menu of services to a diverse population of Village View residents aged 60 and older. In the last year alone, our NORC served over 400 older adult residents in the Village View Co-op, with our social service, mental health and nursing programs as well as through our community education/recreation and health promotion events. We welcomed nearly 100 new registrants with our program through increased outreach efforts, increased capability to service more participants with additional staff and new unique events that invite residents to age safely, healthy and happily in place.

Our staff provided nearly 1,300 case and healthcare management hours, and nearly 1,200 healthcare and case assistance units as well as over 650 contacts for information assistance. Our program overdelivered in providing educational and recreational programming with over 130 sessions in 2023. Our health promotion events were attended over 475 times, and we are continuing to expand evidence-based programming by providing SAIL to increase balance and mobility for our participants, as well as Health Coaching for Blood Pressure and Walk with Ease.

Our NORC is always partnering with new organizations to provide myriad events including but not limited in pertaining to legal issues, housing, health insurance, safety and elder abuse, financial independence, art and cultural events, musical concerts, and holiday gatherings. Additionally, we also provide weekly housekeeping services and telephone reassurance to any Village View older adults who request them. Nursing services are at the core of our program and are heavily relied on by our older adults.

Unfortunately, nursing and health care services, which contracted NORC programs are required to provide, are not fully covered by City-funded NORC contracts. While these services had previously been covered by



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healthcare providers pro-bono, with changes to the healthcare system over the years these agreements have eroded. NORCs now scramble to cover the hourly rates of their health and nursing providers, which can exceed \$90/hour.

Without the support of the City Council's NORC Initiative, many programs would not be able to continue to provide critical services to so many older adults in New York City. To sustain and strengthen the NORC program, the FY25 budget must restore this Initiative to FY23 funding levels of \$6.4 million, with \$1.3 million to directly support health and nursing services, filling a funding gap for NORC providers. The restoration of these funds will help ensure these programs can continue to provide services to NORC residents.

Moving forward, we believe the NORC model is one that should be uplifted and expanded, and we support efforts to establish new NORCs across New York City, including both Classic and Neighborhood NORCs.

Thank you to the City Council for your support and time, and I would be happy to answer any questions at spidzyraylo@universitysettlement.org.