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## **Testimony Before New York City Council Committee on Civil Service and Labor**

**(New York, NY, 5/7/20)** – Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access, gave this written testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Civil Service and Labor regarding Intro. 1918 (pay premiums for essential workers) and Intro. 1923 (just cause employment protections for essential workers):

“Thank you to the New York City Council Committee on Civil Service and Labor for the opportunity to submit testimony on this issue. My name is Cal Hedigan and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Community Access. We are one of New York’s leading providers of affordable and supportive housing for New Yorkers who live with mental health concerns. We provide housing to over 1,300 individuals and families across three boroughs and serve many more through treatment programs, crisis respite, mobile teams, peer specialist training, and other support services.

Community Access is committed to social justice in all its forms, including economic justice for our non-salaried staff members who are doing vital work every day, especially now, during the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis. That’s why we made the decision to compensate our frontline workers with appreciation pay (otherwise known as incentive pay) starting on March 22, 2020. We did this, in part, based on the assurance from our city contracting agencies that they would cover these necessary COVID-19 related costs. While many New Yorkers have lost their jobs, and many are working from home, our housing staff are still out there delivering essential services to some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Community Access is grateful to the New York City Council for turning its attention to frontline workers. It is commendable that these two pieces of legislation, Intro. 1918 and Intro. 1923, aim to recognize, compensate, and protect those very workers on whom we rely so heavily.

Despite our solidarity with the intention of these pieces of legislation, there are a number of concerns Community Access wishes to raise with the Committee, and a few key adjustments we ask the Committee to consider.

With regard to Intro. 1918, we will raise one major issue: there is no corresponding funding stream to support this mandate for non-profits. At a time when budgets are incredibly tight, and the future is increasingly uncertain, we respectfully request that the Council exempt nonprofits from this mandate altogether. In addition, we urge the Council to work closely with Mayor de Blasio and his administration to bring to fruition the commitment they have already

made to approve COVID-19 incentive pay structures for nonprofit housing providers. Residential providers across the city submitted plans to contracting agencies four weeks ago. At the time of submitting this testimony, none has been approved. This is an untenable situation for providers.

Long before COVID-19, the nonprofit sector, Community Access included, has advocated for more funding from our city and state partners to secure the financial future of the sector while continuing to provide the essential services so critically needed here in our city. COVID-19 has unfortunately laid bare what those of us in the sector have been saying for decades: the nonprofit sector is decidedly underfunded and under-resourced and in need of serious reform if we are to maintain service delivery.

Some nonprofits with cash resources have already implemented COVID-19 incentive pay structures, with little more than a promise from the Mayor's administration to go on. Others, who do not have the resources available, have not because they cannot. To date, Community Access has spent over \$160,000 in appreciation pay for close to 300 employees. We are projected to spend \$600,000 by May 30th.

It is with great respect that we ask the New York City Council to exempt nonprofits from this mandate and urge Council Members to work together with the de Blasio Administration to ensure existing efforts to implement incentive pay through City contracts happen with the speed that is required in this public health crisis.

With regard to Intro. 1923, it is Community Access' position that, while the motive and goal of the legislation is admirable, it is unworkable for most nonprofits in its current form. It is essential that any employment protections for nonprofit staff be directly tied to funding via city contracts. These two things are inextricably linked and to mandate that nonprofits continue to employ people even if the very wages they are receiving are cut or eliminated from City contracts is not feasible. To that end, we respectfully request that the City Council consider legislation that would mandate that the City will continue to fund 100% of budgeted personnel costs for cancelled or reduced contracts for all current and new City contracts moving forward, until agencies can shift affected staff to new positions within other programs/funding streams.

Community Access is committed to ensuring that all nonprofit workers have access to workplace protections and are appropriately compensated for their work and dedication to our city and its residents. To that end, we are grateful to the New York City Council for taking on these crucial issues. We look forward to working together to create a more just and equitable New York City for us all. Thank you."

**About Community Access:**

Community Access' mission is to expand opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

[www.communityaccess.org](http://www.communityaccess.org)

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