



April 30, 2009

Honorable Christine Quinn
Speaker, New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Quinn:

The Women's City Club of New York (WCC) writes to express its support of Help Desks, staffed by representatives of nonprofit organizations, in New York City government entitlement offices and to urge you to endorse the implementation of a Pilot Project in an HRA job site to document their need and effectiveness. Given the economic condition of the City at this time, it is important to point out that Help Desks would be budget neutral, as the "cost" to train and assign the nonprofit representative - whether a staff member, trained volunteer or intern - would be borne wholly by the nonprofit organization.

As you know, the WCC, founded in 1915, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan multi-issue activist organization dedicated to promoting public policies and responsive government to improve the lives of New Yorkers. While our advocacy responds to contemporary needs, the support of programs and services to lift and keep people out of poverty remains a priority.

Currently, Help Desks are authorized in other offices such as the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) in Brooklyn where OTDA holds hearings on fair hearing claims for public assistance benefits; however, they are banned from NYC government offices today. The current lack of Help Desks hinders access to meaningful public benefits for those most in need, especially those with limited English who are unsure of their eligibility and are unable to negotiate the often difficult application process.

Though we understand and appreciate that the City has attempted to make the public benefit application process (for City, State and Federal support) more readily available and understandable through its website, Access NYC, we feel that many of the most vulnerable of New Yorkers neither have access to a computer, nor have the technological knowledge to research the information they need to successfully apply and/or recertify. In addition, a computer cannot assist an applicant to secure the documentation needed.

As legislative approval is required to implement the Pilot Project, we turn to you to assume leadership among the 51 members of the City Council who already have expressed support of Help Desks. We urge you to help make this improvement a reality for New York's most vulnerable population.

Sincerely,

Ruth E. Acker
President

Elizabeth Lubetkin Lipton
Chair, Poverty Task Force

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