



Testimony on Post 9/11 Human
and Social Service Needs in New York City

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**The Committee on General Welfare and
The Select Committee on Lower Manhattan Redevelopment
New York City Council**

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Good morning. My name is Lynn Kelly and I am the Executive Director of MFY Legal Services, Inc. I am pleased to testify in support of the wonderful proposal from University Settlement for funding for a Lower Manhattan Anti-Eviction Network. The proposal recognizes that civil legal services is an essential part of the social safety net for residents of Lower Manhattan who are still recovering from the World Trade Center disaster. The collaboration between social workers and attorneys that is at the heart of this proposal is very near and dear to MFY. We are celebrating our 40th anniversary this year and our roots are in Chinatown and the Lower East Side. MFY began as Mobilization for Youth, a pioneering social work agency on the Lower East Side. In 1968, the legal unit separately incorporated as MFY Legal Services, Inc. and our mission expanded to all age groups. MFY now includes 30 staff members with a Neighborhood Preservation Project including the East Side SRO Project focused on Manhattan, a citywide Mental Health Law Project and Adult Home Project and the largest Workplace Justice Project in the City.

I would like to share with you some of the reasons why MFY believes that it is essential that legal resources be expanded to assist the social workers and case workers at our partner agencies. First and foremost, the demand for legal assistance to prevent evictions is increased. In 2001, MFY handled 1,744 housing cases. In 2002, MFY handled 2,189 housing cases including 100 cases that needed a lawyer to take the case all the way to a trial or a dispositive motion with a decision by a judge. Even with handling a 25% increase in caseload, MFY has to turn away households with meritorious cases.

Second, we believe that preventing evictions is essential to stabilizing Lower Manhattan. Low and moderate income clients are more vulnerable after September 11. At MFY we see a decreased resiliency in the people seeking our help. Not only the poor but the newly unemployed feel fragile and report to us that they do not think they can stand up for their rights on their own. It is worse if they lived or worked in Lower Manhattan because they have been through a traumatic event. They want and need an advocate. In recent months we have seen a large number of contingent workers through our Workplace Justice Project. These are workers who are placed through temporary

agencies or who are treated as independent contractors by their employers. There have been layoffs in recent months from the financial printing industry in Lower Manhattan. We continue to see garment workers approaching retirement who have lost jobs. People who lose jobs still need to pay the rent. The unemployment system in New York is difficult and the maximum benefits is \$405 a week. Many unemployed get only \$105 a week.

At the same time that Lower Manhattan residents are having trouble coping with job loss, depression and vulnerability, many report feeling like their landlords want to evict them so that they can raise rents. Despite the disaster, the downtown housing market has not seen falling rents for low and moderate income people. Instead, the downtown housing market has been fueled by incentives for moderate and wealthy households to move into the neighborhood.

This pressure and vulnerability is very strong for senior citizens. We see seniors who still work to have some income to bridge the gap between their fixed social security payments and their rent. Seniors are desperate to hang on to the shrinking number of rent controlled and rent stabilized apartments and landlords know that if they get them out, they rent those apartments for a lot more.

MFY urges the City Council to push for funding for this worthy proposal which will help to stabilize the neighborhood and help out residents of Lower Manhattan who may otherwise face eviction without social and legal services to help them through this difficult time.