



CAUCUS OFFICERS

Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages, Chair
Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz, 1st Vice Chair
Senator Zellnor Myrie, 2nd Vice Chair
Senator Julia Salazar, Treasurer
Senator Nathalia Fernandez, Secretary
Assemblyman Demond Meeks, Parliamentarian
Assemblywoman Stefani Zinerman, Chaplain

SPEAKER OF THE ASSEMBLY

Carl E. Heastie

MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY

George Alvarez	Latoya Joyner
Khaleel Anderson	Ron Kim
Juan Ardila	Grace Lee
Jeffrion L. Aubry	Nikki Lucas
Anil Beephan Jr.	Brian Maher
Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn	Zohran Mamdani
Kenny Burgos	Marcela Mitaynes
Monique Chandler-Waterman	Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes
Vivian Cook	J. Gary Pretlow
Brian Cunningham	Steven Raga
Taylor Darling	Jenifer Rajkumar
Maritza Davila	Philip Ramos
Manny De Los Santos	Karines Reyes
Inez Dickens	Jonathan Rivera
Erik Dilan	Nily Rozic
Charles Fall	Nader Sayegh
Phara Forrest	Amanda Septimo
Eddie Gibbs	Sarahana Shrestha
Jessica González-Rojas	Tony Simone
Pamela Hunter	Yudelka Tapia
Alicia Hyndman	Al Taylor
Chantel Jackson	Clyde Vanel
Kimberly Jean-Pierre	Latrice Walker
	Jaime Williams
	John Zaccaro, Jr.



CAUCUS OFFICERS

Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages, Chair
Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz, 1st Vice Chair
Senator Zellnor Myrie, 2nd Vice Chair
Senator Julia Salazar, Treasurer
Senator Nathalia Fernandez, Secretary
Assemblyman Demond Meeks, Parliamentarian
Assemblywoman Stefani Zinerman, Chaplain

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE & MAJORITY LEADER

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

MEMBERS OF THE SENATE

Jamaal Bailey	Monica Martinez
Jabari Brisport	Kevin S. Parker
Samra Brouk	Roxanne Persaud
Iwen Chu	Jessica Ramos
Cordell Cleare	Gustavo Rivera
Leroy Comrie	James Sanders Jr,
Jeremy Cooney	Luis Sepulveda
Kristen Gonzalez	José Serrano
Robert Jackson	Kevin Thomas
John Liu	Lea Webb



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

“A Demand for Justice”

BUDGET & REVENUE

Budget Transparency & Oversight

The Executive currently lacks transparency in disclosing the allocation of funds and the implementation of budget measures, ranging from capital projects funding to the rainy-day fund. The Caucus emphasizes the need for increased transparency in the budget process and advocates for enhanced oversight by the legislature and the New York State Comptroller's office.

NYS Working Families Tax Credit

The proposed NYS Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), backed by the Caucus, streamlines the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Empire State Child Tax Credit (CTC). It addresses existing gaps by including children aged 0-3, irrespective of citizenship status, and eliminating the phase-in for the lowest-income families. The new system increases the maximum credit to \$1,500 per child, provides a \$500 credit per child regardless of income, and removes the cap on eligible children. The NYS WFTC adopts a quarterly payout system, delivering an average increase of \$1,090 for families with one to three children, while those without children still qualify for the state EITC.

Universal Basic Income Pilot Program

Create and fund a \$3 million Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot program in New York State to reduce poverty rates and improve the well-being of New Yorkers. In 2021, New York's poverty rate was 13.9% - marking the 7th year the state has surpassed the national average. With the state's most vulnerable communities disproportionately living in poverty, implementing a UBI program will create a more secure social safety net for those most in need. The program will also allow low-income New Yorkers to afford basic necessities, alleviate their financial stressors, and improve their physical and mental health.

Earned Income Tax Credit

The Caucus supports expanding the New York State Earned Income Tax Credit by permanently increasing the state credit percentage to 45% of the federal credit, and adjusting filing requirements for immigrant tax-filers, to incentivize employment and improve overall well-being. Additionally, shifting credits to monthly or quarterly disbursements, similar to the temporary federal child allowance, will further amplify the impact of these initiatives.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal program encouraging employers to hire individuals facing employment barriers. New York underuses WOTC, ranking lowest among 18 states in certified employees per population. Employers can claim WOTC for hiring from 10 specific groups in their first year, certified by a local agency, and working at least 400 hours. These groups include Qualified IV-A Recipient, Veteran, Ex-Felon, Designated Community Resident, Vocational Rehabilitation Referral, Summer Youth Employee, SNAP recipient, SSI Recipient, Long Term Family Assistance Recipient, and Qualified Long-Term Unemployment Recipient. The Caucus supports a state WOTC to promote higher disadvantaged New Yorkers.

Reform the Estate Tax, or Tax Inherited Income

Like capital gains, many wealthy people make their money not from going to work, but from inheriting enormous sums of money from their family. Currently, in New York, individuals can inherit up to \$5 million in a year without facing any taxes—a concerning loophole contributing to economic inequality. Despite having an estate tax, the state's current rates (ranging from 5% to 16%) apply only to estates exceeding \$5.85 million, one of the highest exemptions nationwide. Intergenerational wealth accumulation remains a significant driver of long-term inequality, necessitating a comprehensive overhaul of tax policies.

To address this issue, the Caucus proposes a multifaceted approach. We advocate for lowering the estate tax threshold and introducing progressive marginal tax rates for estates surpassing \$750,000. Additionally, the Caucus calls for reforms such as altering estate tax rates and brackets, implementing a gift tax, and introducing a tax on inherited income. This comprehensive strategy will generate funds for general governmental purposes as well as actively contribute to the reduction of racial and economic inequality, especially crucial given the disparities in wealth accumulation. It's a proactive step towards creating a fairer, more equitable New York.

Personal Income Tax

Prior to the 2008 financial crisis, New York's Personal Income Tax (PIT) was flat for all income earned above \$40,000. To fill budget gaps created by the ensuing recession, the legislature created two higher tax brackets on income above \$300,000 and \$500,000. For the FY 2023-2024 budget, the Caucus supports an increase in the rates for the "millionaire" brackets (for about \$1 million, \$5 million, and \$25 million in annual income), and the restoration of the \$500,000 tax bracket.

Capital Gains on a Mark-to-Market Basis

The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) estimates that New Yorkers with more than \$30 million in assets collectively hold more than \$3 trillion in unrealized capital gains — 46 percent of their total wealth. Much of this wealth will not be taxed under current law, largely due to the step up in basis rules that eliminate taxable gain when assets are passed on to one's heirs at death. The Caucus calls for a tax on capital gains on a mark-to-market basis. This tax is necessary to address the growing wealth inequality crisis and to raise the necessary funds to fill budget gaps and to fully fund the programs New York State needs.

Ammunition Tax

In their 2022 State of the State address, the Executive introduced a three-part agenda aimed at preventing and reducing gun violence and violent crime. A key focus is ensuring sufficient funds for individuals and organizations actively involved in addressing gun violence at the grassroots level. In alignment with this goal, the Caucus supports the proposal to establish an excise tax on ammunition, with 100% of the revenue earmarked for supporting gun violence intervention efforts.

Long-Term Capital Gains

Capital gain is profit from the sale of assets such as stocks and bonds, real estate, intellectual property, or artwork. New York taxes capital gains at the same rates as all other income from other sources. The federal tax code, however, provides a significant tax break for long-term capital gains. While the top federal tax rate on individual income is 37 percent (and was 39.6 percent prior to the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act), the top federal tax rate on long-term capital gains is just 20 percent. According to the Tax Policy Center, in 2019 over 75 percent of all long-term capital gains went to the top 1 percent of earners, and only 6 percent of all long-term capital gains went to the bottom 80 percent of earners. The Caucus calls for raising tax rates on long-term capital gains for high earners; the tax system would better target wealth inequality.

New York's Pass-Through Entity Tax (PTET)

The wealth of the ultra-rich typically manifests in business holdings, whether through privately or publicly owned corporations or through "pass-through" entities like partnerships and LLCs. Taxing business profits becomes a crucial policy tool for both reducing inequality and generating revenue. Currently, this tax is fully rebated, resulting in no additional revenue. However, its primary purpose is not revenue generation but rather to navigate around the federal limitation of the state and local tax deduction, disproportionately benefiting the wealthy. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), 85 percent of the state and local tax deduction's benefit in New York State goes to the top 5 percent of income earners. The Caucus advocates for a partial rebate similar to Connecticut, which rebates only 87.5 percent of its Pass-Through Entity Tax.

Digital Ad Tax

Every day, New Yorkers unwittingly trade their personal information for access to digital platforms, with large digital companies collecting and selling this data to digital advertisers. By imposing taxes on the substantial gross digital advertising revenue of these large companies, New York aims to indirectly tax the widespread exchange of personal data, creating essential new revenue for the state. In a state marked by both extraordinary wealth and significant poverty, it is only equitable to request those who can afford it to contribute more revenue to address our state's priorities, particularly considering their previous exemption from sales taxation. The Caucus calls for a digital ad tax to raise \$1.2 billion annually for our state.

Profit-Shifting of Multinational Corporations

The Caucus advocates for an increase in the amount of Global Intangible Low-Taxed Income (GILTI) includible in the state corporate tax. GILTI is a provision of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that targets the profit-shifting of multinational corporations by taxing unusually high profits in overseas jurisdictions.

Medical Cannabis Excise Tax Repeal

New York's medical cannabis faces one of the nation's highest tax rates, unlike neighboring states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont, where no excise tax is imposed. Massachusetts has a 0% total tax rate, and New Jersey has a 2% total rate. Alongside challenges in obtaining a medical card and limited dispensaries, this severely limits patient access, particularly for economically disadvantaged New Yorkers. Despite proven benefits, such as a 51% reduction in opioid use for chronic pain patients, the current program has generated minimal tax revenues, totaling \$12.9M in FY2022. With New York trailing 27 other states in medical patient enrollment per capita, urgent improvements are essential, which is why the Caucus supports the repeal of the 7% excise tax on medical cannabis products to ensure equitable patient access to these vital health products.

Rainy Day Fund

While it is imperative that the Executive make immediate investments into the state's social infrastructure to promote more positive outcomes for New Yorkers, it remains important for the state to set aside a rainy-day fund in preparation for a potential fiscal downturn. The Caucus supports setting aside reserves when feasible to protect crucial programs and essential services.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

HOUSING

Greenlining

Greenlining, or designating neighborhoods solely for new and renovated homes, serves as an affordable housing tool and as a neighborhood revitalization tool. As a remedy for the generations of redlining, the Caucus calls on the Executive to focus on Greenlining initiatives that address systemic racial barriers to housing and address the effects of long-term community disinvestment.

Fair Housing

Although New York State established a fair housing enforcement program in 2016, employing paired testing to prevent discrimination, an investigation by Newsday discovered that the state did not conduct further paired testing after the initial round. The Caucus supports the implementation of a fee on real estate agents to fund an ongoing paired testing program and to enforce penalties on agents found to be discriminating against clients. Furthermore, the Caucus is calling for the state to invest a minimum of \$8 million to HCR's Fair Housing Testing Program beginning in the SFY 2024-2025 budget. This will allow the six QFHOs to expand their level of service, significantly deepen work within their service areas, particularly in peripheral counties without dedicated staff.

Create a State Voucher System (HAVP)

New York State must urgently fund the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), providing rental vouchers to 50,000 households at risk of homelessness. Like Section 8, HAVP requires recipients to pay 30% of their income toward rent, with the voucher covering the rest, up to 110% of Fair Market Rent. This critical initiative addresses the housing crisis, especially for families unable to access Section 8 due to capacity or immigration status limitations. HAVP not only reduces shelter costs but also prevents families from enduring eviction court processes. With over 150,000 people statewide experiencing homelessness, exacerbated by a 10% increase in New York City's homeless population since January, the Caucus believes HAVP is essential to mitigate this crisis and avoid traumatic eviction experiences for families, regardless of immigration status. The Caucus urges the state to fund the HAVP program at \$250 million.

Statewide Right to Counsel

Every year, at least 80 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income New Yorkers go unmet. According to the Brennan Center, fewer than 20 percent of low-income families with civil legal needs can obtain the services of counsel to help them gain access to the courts. As we continue to experience a foreclosure crisis and an affordable housing crisis in New York, we must ensure that our most vulnerable populations are receiving proper representation when they cannot afford to obtain such representation on their own.

Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act

The Caucus supports a budget allocation of \$200 million annually over the next 5 years to give tenants a fair opportunity to purchase the building they live in if it goes up for sale. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act will help tenants build intergenerational wealth, prevent communities from being uprooted, and preserve affordable housing for New Yorkers. This is an important tool in our fight to ensure our neighbors can remain in their homes and curb speculative real estate practices that have led to gentrification and displacement of New Yorkers of color.

Mitchell-Lama Repair Fund

Establishing a dedicated fund for current Mitchell-Lama properties is crucial, considering the program's significance in providing affordable housing for the middle class in New York. The housing conditions in these affordable rental and co-op properties are deteriorating due to a lack of funds for significant renovation projects. In 2023, the Comptroller highlighted ongoing hazardous conditions at Mitchell-Lama properties.

To address this issue, the Caucus proposes a fund to provide essential financial assistance to Mitchell-Lama properties, enabling them to undertake necessary renovations, improve housing quality, and meet local code standards. Administered by HCR, the fund would require pre-approval for any repair projects, ensuring targeted and effective use of resources to enhance the overall condition of Mitchell-Lama properties.

Communities First

New York's housing affordability crisis is putting working families, seniors, and their communities at risk. Vital federal programs to assist homeowners have ended and key financial regulations are being threatened. Meanwhile, reverse mortgage foreclosures are on the rise, foreclosure rescue scams targeting seniors and communities of color proliferate, and the stability of immigrant homeowners is being threatened, exacerbating New York's affordable housing crisis. Communities First leverages New York State's existing network of housing counselors and legal services providers to revitalize neighborhoods and keep New Yorkers from displacement. Since the creation of the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP) in 2012, Communities First has prevented over 22,500 foreclosures and served more than 95,000 New Yorkers statewide. The Caucus supports a funding allocation of \$50 million to support the HOPP.

Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Program

The Caucus acknowledges the need for building more affordable and supportive housing in the state. We must ensure that communities of color who experience higher rates of rent burden, homelessness and reside in neighborhoods that have lower vacancy rates are accommodated. That is why the Legislature allocated \$100 million in each of the last 2 enacted budgets to fund the conversion of distressed hotels and commercial properties to create more housing for those in need. The Caucus supports a \$1 billion allocation to continue supporting the program's work of bringing more housing justice to New Yorkers.

Community Controlled Affordable Housing Program

The Community Controlled Affordable Housing Program, initially allocated \$1 million in the FY 2023-2024 Budget, established a pilot program providing small operating grants to enhance housing security and control for residents through Community Land Trusts, shared equity co-ops, and other resident-controlled housing models. The program offers \$20,000 grants or \$50,000 per unit for acquisition or pre-development projects. The Caucus advocates for the expansion of this successful pilot to \$5 million and urges an increase in the maximum award amounts per project in the FY 2024-2025 budget.

Public Housing Support

Public housing developments are home to some of New York's most vulnerable populations including seniors and families with young children. Across New York State, our public housing is in disrepair, putting over 600,000 people at risk of lead paint exposure, mold, and other environmental toxins. Public housing developments are regularly without heat and hot water. Residents suffer from non-working elevators, leaks, and infestations. Prior to the administration of Governor George Pataki, New York State provided funding for public housing. It should do so once again to remedy the damage caused by years of disinvestment.

The Caucus supports including \$10 billion in the budget for emergency capital improvements and operating expenses at NYCHA developments, including at least \$3.4 billion in capital funds for SFY 2023 (baselined annually thereafter) and at least \$2.8 billion in operating funds to increase the size of its Capital Projects Division (to allow NYCHA to commit 100 percent of currently allocated capital funds as well as additional capital funds included here), and an additional \$2 billion for public housing outside of New York City in the state of New York. We also request the state allocate these funds to public housing authorities directly for emergency repair projects identified in consultation with the legislators whose districts include public housing developments rather than through the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York.

Senior Housing

The Caucus calls for \$100 million in new funding for designated senior housing across New York State.

Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State (NPCNYS)

The Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State (NPCNYS) plays a crucial role in supporting 140 Neighborhood Preservation Companies (NPCs) by providing technical assistance, training, and up-to-date information on housing and community development resources. NPCNYS assists in HCR applications, annual reports, Grants Gateway compliance, and proposal development for state agencies such as HCR, OTDA, and DEC. They also advocate for best practices, incorporating public health measures into housing activities. To further support the nonprofit business model, the Caucus endorses continued funding for NPCNYS and encourages the expansion of targeted training seminars to enhance their capabilities.

Reduction in the Homeless Population

Homelessness does not represent the failures of individuals and can often find its origins in the absence and inaccessibility of social and economic support. The Caucus will continue to work aggressively to reduce homelessness across New York. Communities throughout the state have seen significant increases in homelessness, and the Caucus intends to help develop resources and initiatives that, in their diversity, provide multi-layered solutions to the problem.

In New York State, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) along with other public housing authorities must work proactively to target their local homeless populations. While there was a strong commitment of funds in previous fiscal years to be put towards homeless housing, more work needs to be done. The Caucus advocates for increased funding for current homeless housing programs.

Wi-Fi Access for Homeless Shelters

As housing scarcity and affordability challenges persist, homelessness rates have risen, exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Remote learning during the pandemic highlighted the difficulties faced by homeless families due to the lack of Wi-Fi access in most of New York City's 450 homeless shelters. The New York City Department of Social Services reports that most shelters do not provide Wi-Fi, impacting around 114,000 children living in shelters. The Caucus supports a state program mandating funding for local social service districts to ensure internet access in all temporary housing, expanding New York's ConnectALL program to include temporary housing sites in their operations and targeting.

NY Land Opportunity Program

The Caucus supports \$2.5 million in the New York State budget for the next statewide cohort of the LISC NY Land Opportunity Program (NYLOP). NYLOP assists Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Mission-Driven Organizations (MDOs) in developing affordable housing across the state. The program, initiated in 2022, has completed one cohort and begun a second, adding 600 units to the NYS affordable housing market. LISC NY aims to expand with a third cohort in 2024, targeting ten participants statewide, covering regions like NYC, Westchester County, the Mid-Hudson Valley, the Capital Region, Rochester, Syracuse, Erie County, and Niagara County.

Foster Care Independent Living

With regard to New York's youth, the child welfare laws enable youth to remain in foster care up to age 21. For those youth who choose to do this, they are not ever able to receive the housing subsidy, as it has been interpreted to end at age 21. These youth never get the opportunity to avail themselves of the child welfare housing subsidy, which would otherwise be an important support for these young adults as they first learn to live on their own, pay rent, and support themselves. The federal government has recognized the value of enabling youth to remain in foster care through age 21 (rather than 18) and in 2008 passed the Fostering Connections to Success Act, which extended federal reimbursement for foster care up to age 21. Other states are now beginning to follow New York's lead in this area. Extending the child welfare housing subsidy through age 24 would be in line with this practice and best support young people through age 21 and beyond. The Caucus supports increasing the rent subsidy payable to a foster child living independently from \$300 a month to \$725 a month.

Displacement Alert Project

Through state support, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development's (ANHD) DAP has provided powerful data tools, visualizations, analysis, and data-driven stories that contribute significantly to addressing the worsening housing crisis in our communities. The Displacement Alert Project has become a vital resource for various stakeholders, including community-based organizations, legal services providers, tenant organizers, and government offices. That is why the Caucus supports a continued allocation of \$250,000 in operating support for DAP in the FY 2025 State Budget.

New York State Supportive Housing Program

To safeguard domestic violence survivors in supportive housing, the Caucus advocates for a \$150 million increase in funding for the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP). Permanent supportive housing stands as a secure and cost-effective solution for survivors of domestic violence. Unfortunately, NYSSHP, a lifeline for many survivors, has faced chronic underfunding for decades, with rates remaining nearly unchanged since the program's inception in 1987. This insufficient support disproportionately affects survivors, primarily single mothers of color, highlighting the urgent need for increased funding to provide them with the care and security they deserve.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

CLIMATE ACTION, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND ENERGY

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

The Caucus calls for an additional \$500 million in funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), particularly requiring the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to allocate the expanded funding to the Cooling Assistance Program to subsidize summer utility bill costs for low-income customers. This initiative will make a significant impact on getting New York State to the commitment of capping energy burden at 6% for all households.

New York Home Energy Affordable Transition Act

The NY HEAT Act is a vital initiative aimed at safeguarding low-income families from gas price volatility and halting unnecessary gas infrastructure expansion. Beyond economic benefits, NY HEAT accelerates New York's transition away from climate-damaging fossil fuels, saving families up to \$75/month on energy bills while capping them at 6% of income. It eliminates the 100-foot rule, saving \$200 million annually, and redirects funds from replacing outdated gas pipes to clean electrification projects, potentially saving \$150 billion. The Caucus urges including NY HEAT in the budget.

Climate Change Superfund Act

The Caucus advocates for the creation of a Climate Change Superfund Act, which proposes shifting the financial burden from taxpayers to major greenhouse gas emitters, requiring them to pay \$3 billion annually for 25 years to address climate damage. This fund would support crucial infrastructure improvements, stormwater and sewage system upgrades, grid stability enhancements, and public health improvements across New York City and State, holding corporate polluters accountable for their environmental impact.

Increasing the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

The Caucus urges an increase in funding for the EPF as we work towards a goal of \$500 million by 2025. In particular, we urge the increase of the environmental justice line in the EPF, to ensure that frontline communities are receiving tangible environmental health benefits.

Combating PFAS & Other Emerging Contaminants

The Caucus supports the proposal for a \$25 million program funded through DEC to assist local municipalities and water systems that serve at-risk communities to test and filter PFAS and other emerging contaminants.

Clean Water Infrastructure Act Funding

The Caucus strongly advocates for the legislature to renew its commitment to the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) with a \$5 billion, 5-year budgetary allocation. As the original 5-year commitment concludes this year, the CWIA has proven successful in funding various municipal water infrastructure programs. Additionally, we specifically request that \$1 billion of this commitment be exclusively allocated to the Lead Service Line Replacement Program. This dedicated funding will greatly assist municipalities in developing lead service line inventories and aligns with our commitment to achieving 100% lead service line replacement. The Caucus firmly supports these initiatives for the betterment of water infrastructure across the state.

Addressing Lead Exposure & Poisoning

As part of the Proactive Registry and Inspection Program, the State allocated \$10 million to the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) to support lead abatement for struggling landlords in designated Communities of Concern. The Caucus urges the renewal of this funding, emphasizing that it should be reserved for landlords with demonstrated financial need engaged in comprehensive abatement activities to eliminate lead as a long-term concern, extending beyond the maintenance of painted surfaces.

Additionally, the State allocated \$325 million in SFY2023 to facilitate lead hazard testing and program administration. The Caucus emphasizes the importance of retaining these funds in the FY 2024-25 budget to ensure continued efforts in addressing lead hazards and protecting public health.

Moreover, the Caucus calls for \$50 million for local city and county health departments to support the existing and additional counties within the Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention Program responsible for NY's children with elevated blood lead levels.

A Just Energy Transition

The Just Energy Transition Act (JETA) is crucial for fulfilling the mandates of the New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, aiming for 70% renewable energy generation by 2030 and a zero-emissions electricity sector by 2040. To achieve these goals while prioritizing disadvantaged communities, JETA directs agencies like NYSERDA and DEC to phase out at least 4 gigawatts of New York's oldest and most polluting fossil fuel facilities by 2030. The transition involves replacing them with renewable energy generation, energy storage systems, and upgraded electricity transmission and distribution systems. The Caucus supports JETA, emphasizing New York's commitment to a fossil fuel-free future, with leadership from impacted workers, communities, and businesses, without job losses or community harm.

The Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund

A just transition means supporting and investing in low and moderate-income households to assist with their electrical upgrades, weatherization, and energy efficiency. Therefore, the Caucus advocates for the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund, crucial for addressing electrification barriers not covered by existing programs. This initiative aligns with our commitment to environmental sustainability and equity. The fund aids disadvantaged households, whether renters or homeowners, by providing "gap" funding for their every transition needs. This support encompasses green and healthy homes, whole-house upgrades, electrification readiness, and more.

NYS Children's Environmental Health Centers

The NYS Children's Environmental Health Centers, aka "NYSCHECK", serve to prevent, diagnose, and treat environmentally related conditions for families across New York State. As the first state-based model for pediatric environmental health services in the country, New York now has dedicated pediatric champions across the state working together to protect and promote children's health and the environment. The Caucus supports an increase in funding to the New York State Children's Environmental Health Centers (NYSCHECK) by \$1M to \$5Million in funding.

Community Directed Climate Solutions Grant Program

The Caucus strongly supports the establishment of the Community Directed Climate Solutions Grant Program. This program aims to create a grant fund and administrative office to offer direct support to consortia of Community/Constituency-Based Organizations (CBO), unions, and local governments, primarily led by disadvantaged communities. The funds will be utilized for community energy planning. The proposed allocation includes (1) \$248 million for grants, ensuring at least three grants of at least \$1 million go to CBOs in each county, and (2) \$10 million for CBOs in and serving Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) identified by and at the discretion of the Climate Justice Working Group.

Sustainability Workforce Training Center

To further advance the states' sustainability and workforce development, the Caucus supports funding for the Sustainability Workforce Training Center (SWTC) at PUSH Buffalo. This financial support will cover construction costs, programming, and operations, leveraging existing public investments from entities like ESD and NYSERDA, as well as private investments and partnerships with the University at Buffalo and other workforce providers. The allocated funds will specifically address capital construction costs, staffing, purchase of training modules and equipment, curriculum development, licensing, third-party trainers, participant stipends, and transportation options such as transit passes and a passenger van.

Clean Energy Programs at Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow

The Caucus strongly advocates for funding aimed at workforce research and planning under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). New York requires a comprehensive approach to cultivate a robust Green Workforce for the future. The Clean Energy Programs at Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow (NEST) have a proven track record of addressing these issues and convening crucial stakeholders across Upstate New York. Specifically, we support allocating \$1 million for an in-depth study on climate education and clean energy career assets and needs, along with \$4 million for a two-year interagency and stakeholder working group.

Increased Staffing for Relevant Climate Action Agencies

For New York to meet the goals of the CLCPA, and efficiently administer key programs that protect our environment and public health, there must be an increase in staffing in key New York State agencies. We urge an investment in our state environmental agencies by increasing staffing levels putting them on the path to restoration to their 2008 levels, including:

- Authorizing a total of 3,300 Full-time Employees (FTEs) at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Authorizing a total of 2,300 FTEs at Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
- Authorizing the addition of 10 FTEs at the Department of Agriculture and Markets
- Authorizing an increase of several hundred FTEs in the Department of Health.

In addition, the Caucus calls for the inclusion of a Tribal Affairs Liaison in the Office of Renewable Energy Siting within the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to ensure the state is working collaboratively with the sovereign tribal nations as we seek to increase our actions relating to the climate crisis.

Protect Forests to Fight Climate Change

New York's forests play an essential role in sequestering climate-altering carbon from our air. The fight for climate justice extends beyond communities of color that bear the brunt of climate change impacts. To achieve climate justice, New York must better protect and manage public and private forests to meet the goals set forth in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. The Caucus supports an updated conservation easement program and forest tax law incentives to incentivize carbon sequestration.

Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE)

The survey will provide a comprehensive assessment of Adirondack lakes, guiding our state in reducing asthma-causing pollutants, reducing carbon emissions, and achieving climate justice. This survey will support the critical work of researchers that have protected our air for decades and leverage substantial research infrastructure and expertise. Consortium partners include leading scientists and water resource managers from universities, not-for-profits, and state and federal agencies. The Caucus calls for \$4 million to continue funding this important climate action project.

Clean Fuel Standard

New York faces a serious threat from greenhouse gas emissions, primarily originating from its transportation sector, contributing over 34% of the state's annual emissions. The heavy reliance on petroleum-based fuels, especially for trucks, leads to respiratory illnesses, high hospitalization costs, and increased mortality rates. Global warming exacerbates these issues, impacting health, the environment, and economic stability.

While New York follows California's standards for low-emission vehicles, there's a need for greater efforts to address transportation sector threats comprehensively. Diversifying transportation fuel sources and embracing innovative, low-emission solutions not only mitigates environmental risks but also brings significant economic benefits, safeguarding jobs and industries. The Caucus calls on the state to adopt the clean fuel standards in the state budget.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE

Health

New York Health Act

The Caucus supports the passage of the New York Health Act which would create a single-payer health care system for all New Yorkers regardless of age, income, employment, or documentation status.

Coverage for All

Since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act, millions of New Yorkers have gained health insurance coverage. Unfortunately, many Americans with immigrant status are not eligible for these benefits, leaving more than 400,000 immigrant New Yorkers to remain without coverage. This can create significant costs and challenges for the New York State Health Care System, as care is often only sought out and paid for in emergency settings and individuals are unable to seek care for potentially preventable conditions and diseases, which directly impacts them and the communities in which they live and work. The SFY 2022-23 budget included language expanding Medicaid to provide coverage to undocumented individuals aged 65 or older. The Caucus advocates to extend health benefits to New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status.

Removing the Medicaid Global Cap

The 2011 state budget imposed a percentage cap on Medicaid spending growth as proposed by the former Governor's Medicaid Redesign Team. The cap is calculated on an annual basis based upon the overall health care inflation rate seen over the past decade. For budgets, changes have been made, such as moving some expenditures out from under the cap and putting other expenditures back under it. The SFY 2022-23 Budget revised the cap to increase transparency, however, the basic policy of a Medicaid Cap remains. The Caucus is calling for the removal of the Medicaid global cap.

Medical Debt

The Department of Health distributes over a billion annually in ICP funding to public and voluntary hospitals throughout the state. As a condition of receiving ICP funding, the law requires hospitals to offer free or discounted care to uninsured low- and moderate-income patients. Recent studies and news stories have documented that some hospitals are pursuing extraordinary collection actions and lawsuits against patients who live in neighborhoods that are disproportionately low-income or have a high percentage of people of color, furthering the income and racial inequality. The Caucus is advocating to require hospitals to use a uniform financial assistance policy and application as a condition of participation in the indigent care pool fund (ICP) and to expand the eligibility and protections available through financial assistance to address many of these adverse impacts to people of color and the working poor.

Fully Fund the Medicaid Managed Care Quality Incentive Program

The Caucus urges the state to prioritize fully funding the Quality Incentive Program at \$268 million, requiring an additional state investment of \$156 million. As a national leader in Medicaid care, New York's success is attributed to efforts by managed care plans and community partners. The Quality Incentive Program is indispensable in advancing Medicaid quality by rewarding plans for delivering care to over six million New Yorkers. These measures address health disparities and contribute to better health outcomes for underserved populations. Consistent reductions in program funding jeopardize the well-being of Medicaid members.

Indigent Care Pool Funding/ Safety Net Hospitals

The redistribution of indigent care pool funding to better target support to safety net hospitals which provide services to persons who are uninsured, under insured, or insured under Medicaid. The Caucus advocates for an increase in Medicaid reimbursement to sustain hospitals like safety net and qualified safety net hospitals who cater to a largely marginalized population of New Yorkers.

Moreover, the Caucus supports prioritizing the distribution of Statewide Healthcare Facility Transformation Funds to those safety-net hospitals without access to capital. We should also establish an enhanced capital add-on adjustment to the Medicaid rate for safety net hospitals to ensure the capital rate received is equivalent to the statewide average capital rate.

Early Intervention Support

The Early Intervention (EI) Program, catering to 70,000 infants and toddlers with developmental delays, has faced stagnant reimbursement rates for over two decades. Rates in 2023 are even lower than those in 2009, leading to the departure of over 2,500 therapists and the closure of dozens of service agencies since 2019. The Caucus advocates for an 11% reimbursement rate increase for EI, with differentiated rates for in-person services. This initiative aims to address the financial challenges faced by the program, ensuring children with developmental delays have continued access to critical Early Intervention services.

Home Care Worker Protections

New York's essential home care workers, comprising over 210,000 individuals, are vital for the well-being of older adults and those with chronic health conditions. Predominantly women of color, these workers often face mandatory 24-hour shifts, posing risks to their health and safety, as well as that of care recipients. The Caucus supports protecting home care workers from such extended shifts to ensure their well-being and that of care recipients, emphasizing the growing demand for their services amid an aging population.

Community Health Advocates (CHA)

The Community Health Advocates is a free helpline and network of 27 agencies to resolve any problems accessing the health care and coverage they need. The Caucus advocates for \$7 million in funding for CHA in FY24 to meet an increase in demand for services because of two policy changes: (1) CHA's helpline number being listed, since April 2022, on all Medicaid notices of adverse determination; and (2) the end of the Public Health Emergency that could potentially result in the avoidable risk of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers losing Medicaid, putting them at health and economic risk and disrupting the healthcare system.

Combating Diseases

State Medicaid coverage of self-measured blood pressure (SMBP)

Strong scientific evidence shows that self-measured blood pressure (SMBP) monitoring, also known as home blood pressure monitoring, plus clinical support helps people with hypertension lower their blood pressure. Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death, and stroke is among the leading causes of disability, with high blood pressure, or hypertension, among the most important risk factors leading to CVD. In New York State (NYS), an estimated 4.9 million people, or 31.7% of the adult population, have been diagnosed with Hypertension. The Caucus supports state Medicaid coverage of self-measured blood pressure monitoring.

Diabetes

The Caucus is calling for a statewide \$30 cap on insulin, decreasing the cap on cost sharing from \$100 per month to \$30. This is in line with other states who are also addressing access to affordable insulin, including California and Connecticut. It is essential that New York State address the importance of affordable insulin so individuals can properly medicate themselves and avoid any unnecessary complications incurred due to exorbitant and unsustainable insulin costs.

New York State Cancer Services Program

The Cancer Services Program provides low-income, uninsured, and underinsured New Yorkers access to breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings, and diagnostic services, including mammograms, Pap tests, HPV tests, colonoscopies, and diagnostic testing if abnormal results are found. The Caucus supports \$26 million in funding to help restore funding.

Coverage for Asthma Treatment

The Caucus advocates for a statewide asthma management and control program to address the growing disparities in asthma prevalence, particularly among marginalized communities. This program aims to coordinate efforts across various stakeholders, including individuals, families, healthcare providers, schools, and community-based organizations. The Department of Health will play a crucial role in studying asthma's prevalence, behavioral and environmental triggers, and case management effectiveness to enhance understanding and care. This initiative seeks to track and mitigate asthma's impact, promoting better health outcomes for affected individuals and families in New York State.

Addressing Maternal & Infant Health

Monetary Maternity Support

The Caucus is advocating for establishing a state funded program to provide all birthing persons \$1,000 a month for the duration of their pregnancy and one year thereafter postpartum. Financial support to prepare and care for a child in this crucial time, will have immense cascading benefits for both the mother and the child.

Nurse Family Partnership

In New York State, the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) is a proven approach to promoting the health and well-being of vulnerable families. As a result, NFP nurses have continued to deliver the program and meet clients' needs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As gaps in prenatal and postpartum care have emerged during the pandemic, NFP has played a crucial role in filling these gaps in care through regular telehealth visits and ongoing communication with clients. NFP nurses were able to identify medical issues and complications and assisted with getting the medical care that families needed. The Caucus supports a continuation of funding for the NFP program.

Chisholm Chance Act

The Caucus endorses a pilot program in New York to address the maternal health crisis, particularly severe maternal morbidity. New York ranks in the bottom third of states for pregnancy-related deaths, with women of color experiencing a death rate three and a half times higher than other women. The highest rates of severe maternal morbidity are concentrated in Kings and the Bronx, with the peak rate found in North and Central Brooklyn. The pilot program aims to address these disparities and improve maternal health outcomes.

Doula Expansion Fund

The Caucus calls on the state to establish a dedicated fund to support community-based doulas and community-based doula organizations. This fund would be assisting those trying to navigate the Federal and State Medicaid frameworks for doula care to become community-based doulas.

Infant Medicaid Coverage

The Caucus advocates for the state to extend Medicaid coverage for infants up to six years after birth, emphasizing the essential child developmental period. The proposal automatically extends eligibility for infants born to Medicaid-eligible mothers, ensuring stable health monitoring and a seamless transition for families. Several states, including Oregon, Washington, and New Mexico, sought federal approval to extend Medicaid and Child Health Plus enrollment for children up to six years. The positive impact of continuous coverage on reducing uninsured rates, preventing financial hardship, and improving health outcomes underscores the necessity of addressing coverage gaps for families.

Health at Home Program

In support of infant and maternal health, the Caucus calls for the inclusion of \$800,000 in the FY 2024-25 budget to support the continuation of the Healthy@Home program. Healthy@Home serves low-income families with significant psychosocial needs and have one or more children with on-going intensive healthcare needs who are institutionalized beyond medical need or who are at risk of hospitalization or placement in long-term care settings.

Safer Consumption Services Act

The Caucus supports the proposal to allow local health districts and the New York State Department of Health to authorize community-based organizations to operate as safer consumption spaces (SCS).

Reproductive Freedom Equity Fund

The Reproductive Freedom Equity Fund would create a mechanism to drive grant funds to improve abortion access in New York. Under this program, the NYS Department of Health would issue grant funding for which abortion providers and non-profit organizations that facilitate access to care are eligible to apply. In recent years, states have continuously restricted access to abortion, effectively banning abortion in some parts of the country. Between navigating legal requirements and delays, affording the cost of care and travel, and managing associated costs such as childcare, lodging, and lost wages, abortion access in the U.S. is already in a perilous position. Bans on abortion are clear displays of discrimination and systemic racism, with the impacts of these actions harming Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, young people, undocumented people, and people having difficulty making ends meet. New York must be a leader in the fight for abortion justice. The Caucus supports \$50 million in state funding towards this goal.

Rural Health Network Development Program

To expand access to cars, the Caucus advocates for the restoration of funding for the Rural Health Network Development Program and the Rural Health Care Access Development Program back to \$16.2 million.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

“A Demand for Justice”

HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE

Mental Hygiene

Office of Addiction & Mental Services

The Caucus endorses the initiative to merge two state agencies, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), forming a new state agency called the Office of Addiction and Mental Health Services. This move aims to facilitate integrated care, recognizing that 70% of individuals with substance use disorder (SUD) have an underlying mental health disorder, and 50% of those with mental illness have an underlying SUD.

Daniel's Law

In the continued remembrance of the life of Daniel Prude, Daniel's Law will ensure a community based, non-police, monitored and planned statewide response framework to better serve anyone in New York State experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis. The Caucus continues to support investing in the statewide emergency and crisis response council as well as the operation and financing of high-quality emergency and crisis services for persons experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis.

Maternal Mental Health

Mothers experience maternal mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety during the perinatal period—one year before and up to two years after a pregnancy. Combating these issues should be a priority of New York State, especially when black women experience a higher prevalence of maternal mental health conditions. Rates among Black women for postpartum depression and postpartum anxiety are especially concerning. In tandem with higher rates of conditions, black pregnant persons see their conditions and issues largely underreported, and unaddressed.

Youth Mental Health

Youth mental health is at an all-time crisis point that needs immediate and bold remedies. To that end, the Caucus is advocating for the below proposals”

- School Counselors/Social Workers/Psychologists Study - increase the number of school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists across New York.
- Youth Telehealth - Establish a telehealth initiative to offer up to five, free mental health services to eligible youth.
- Black Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force - Establish a black youth suicide prevention task force to examine, evaluate, and determine how to improve the mental health and suicide prevention rates for New York’s Black youth ages 5 through 18.
- Enhancing student mental health and mental health literacy in New York's higher education institutions, mandating the adoption of relevant protocols, policies, and programs in SUNY, CUNY, and independent institutions of higher education.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION

Education

Foundation Aid Funding/ Class Sizes

The Caucus continues to support the full funding of Foundation Aid with a phase-in plan. New York's students have been shortchanged for decades. Ensuring a sound, basic education is not a choice for the state government, it is a moral responsibility and, as the courts have said, also a constitutional requirement. New York State must continue to fulfill the promise of CFE and fully fund the Foundation Aid for schools.

Additionally, the Caucus calls for an update to the foundation aid formula.

Expand Student Access to Career and Technical Education (CTE)

The Caucus supports efforts to provide access to high quality career and technical education (CTE) to advance student learning and expand New York State's economy. For FY 2023-24, we urge an investment of \$1.4 million for 14 staff to manage increased volume of CTE program approvals.

Supporting the Blue-Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures

This Commission will review research, practice, and policy to gather input from statewide stakeholders on diploma requirements to ensure all students have access to multiple graduation measures. The funding request would support project management costs and event costs associated with the statewide Commission meetings. The Caucus supports \$200,000 in funding (annually for 2 years).

Creating Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Resources

Funding to curate, compile, and publish a set of racially and culturally inclusive education resources to support teaching and learning, using an interdisciplinary approach in the major subject areas and an additional \$50,000 in 2024-2025 to finalize the work that goes beyond the fiscal year. The Caucus supports \$250,000 towards creating culturally responsive sustaining education resources.

Increase Teacher Diversity

According to the 2019 NYSED report titled "Educator Diversity Report", New York's student of color population is 50 percent. The racial and ethnic composition of the teacher workforce does not reflect the diversity of the student population. Teachers of color are underrepresented statewide. Access to a racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce is beneficial for all students, particularly for students of color, who often thrive in classrooms led by teachers who share their racial and cultural backgrounds. The Caucus supports \$5 million towards enhancing teacher diversity.

Appropriately Resourcing State Aid Oversight & Monitoring

The Office of Education Finance collects and reviews tens of thousands of data points annually to calculate and pay nearly \$30 billion in state funds to districts across the state. The State Aid Office is not staffed sufficiently to perform these tasks. Currently, the State Aid Office has eight professional staff responsible for reviewing all aid claims, three professional staff responsible for making thousands of payments to districts totaling billions of state funds, and three professional staff responsible for all data used in state aid claims and calculations.

The Office of Education Finance comprises two units: State Aid and Fiscal Analysis. The State Aid Office's primary function is to calculate aid payments to districts per the education law and other state laws. As part of this function, the unit maintains a large data collection process where thousands of points of data are collected annually from each district as well as many other units and state agencies. This data must be processed appropriately and reviewed for accuracy. Much of the review and processing is automated by computer programmed checks. Much cannot be automated, and where automated checks exist, staff are needed to review district explanations for relevance, engage with districts that are uncertain on how to report data, and take a deeper dive than automated checks are capable of. The Caucus supports \$1.85M for staffing needs.

Early Childhood Education

Early care and learning programs, beginning from birth to kindergarten, provide the foundation children need to be successful both as students and as adults. Decades of research has established that children in low-income communities and at-risk children benefit the most from high-quality child-care programs and pre-Kindergarten. In New York State, we have made progress in several areas at a very slow pace. Outside of New York City there are still almost 80,000 children without access to full day pre-K.

In Long Island, for example, the vast majority of high-needs children lack access to full day pre-K programs. Long Island is an area with stark socioeconomic differences, with school districts that are racially segregated and overwhelmingly low income. Investing at least \$150 million in expanding quality full day pre-K across New York State would benefit the high-need districts in Long Island and across the state.

Additionally, the Caucus is advocating for \$2 million to address early literacy.

Universal Afterschool Pilot Program

The Caucus supports the establishment of a Universal Afterschool Pilot Program, funded by the state, to provide after-school programming for schools in the five most underfunded community districts in NYC. These districts, identified using the City's poverty measure, include Brooklyn CD 16, Bronx CD 5, Manhattan CD 11, Queens CD 4, and Staten Island CD 1. The program aims to benefit hard-working parents by relieving childcare responsibilities, engage children during peak hours of youth violence, ensure food security by providing dinner, and deliver long-term positive impacts through additional learning and recreation. The initial investment is estimated to range from \$10 to \$30 million, offering substantial benefits over time and aligning with the state's commitment to education funding.

Enhancing Oversight of Pre-K Programs

The Office of Early Learning oversees \$970 million in the State's investment into pre-K as well as the registration and renewals of Voluntary Registered Nursery Schools and Kindergartens. This currently includes 626 districts, 12 agencies, and three BOCES. Since 2019, the Office has received an additional \$120 million in pre-K funding to administer 143 new districts to oversee, with no additional staff to get this important work completed. This has caused a delay in getting funds to the district in a timely manner and prevents important pre-K oversight work and program visits from occurring. As the Caucus advocates for a universal pre-K system statewide, it is crucial that NYSED offices have the financial support needed for quality assurance. The Caucus supports a \$1.9 million allocation to help address the staffing needs in the Office of Early Learning.

Expanding Afterschool Programming

The Caucus supports allocating \$219 million to enhance and support afterschool programs, addressing issues like contract challenges and terminations that affected 45 programs, limiting access for around 8,430 students. This proposed investment represents a \$127 million increase from current funding for programs like the Empire State and Advantage afterschool initiatives, with a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

Additionally, the Caucus supports line-item funding of \$5 million to establish statewide afterschool technical assistance through the NYS Network for Youth Success along with \$1 million to support the New Alternative for Children in NYC.

Healthy School Meals for All

Providing school meals at no cost to all students is a proven strategy to reduce food insecurity, improve mental and physical health, alleviate stigma and administrative barriers to meal access, and support local food purchasing. As food insecurity disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx households, the Caucus advocates for Healthy School Meals for All as a meaningful step to advance racial equity in health and education. The state needs an additional \$65 million to reach full universal meals for all.

Improving Justice System Education Opportunities and Outcomes for Youth

When youth must be confined, detention and placement settings provide an opportunity to re-engage them in their education and future and to reset their trajectory. To do this, educational programs in these settings need the ability to quickly access student records and to perform educational assessment. Educational programs also need the flexibility to design developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, engaging individual education plans that may include, for example, credit recovery, special education services, career and technical education, access to career. The Caucus supports \$6.1 million towards improving justice system education opportunities and outcomes for youth.

Caucus Support for Juvenile Justice Hybrid Programming

The Caucus extends its full support to the Board's proposal for Juvenile Justice Hybrid Programming, allocating \$20 million. Leveraging the lessons learned from virtual instruction, this initiative aims to create a statewide hybrid high school in collaboration with the Office of Children and Family Services. The program is designed to cater to students in juvenile justice settings who cannot attend traditional school programs. Certified teachers will be employed to provide instructional programs, combining onsite staff support and online coursework costs. Operating costs will align with current funding mechanisms for school districts, with startup funding provided for design and implementation.

Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC)

The Department of Education created PLC in 2012 to help educators improve school culture by moving away from punitive disciplinary systems that relied heavily on suspensions. For nearly a decade, PLC has successfully used social-emotional strategies, evidence-based training, and healing practices to overcome systemic barriers that hinder learning and turn schools into joyful communities in which to learn and grow. Reliance on suspensions in 40 PLC schools declined by 46% over the last 10 years and student surveys gauging positive climate increased by over 50%. PLC's team of clinicians and public-school educators including social workers, counselors, psychologists, and behavioral specialists works with a school's existing staff to build on their existing strengths and integrate a multi-tiered model of best practices. This includes culturally and historically responsive education, therapeutic crisis intervention in schools, restorative behavior systems, mindfulness and wellness practices, and restorative and healing circles. The Caucus is requesting \$2 million to sustain this vital program.

My Brother's Keeper

In 2016, New York led the way by becoming the first state in the nation to sign My Brother's Keeper into law. The program has been instrumental in providing new pathways and opportunities to young men of color. The Caucus supports a continuation of \$18 million in state funding to support the My Brother's Keeper program.

The Timbuctoo Pipeline – A Summer Climate and Careers Institute

The Adirondack Park is a national treasure, one that will play a central role in New York's effort to combat climate change. The fight for climate and social justice demands that as we fight climate change, we better connect the Adirondack Park with communities disproportionately impacted by climate change. The Adirondacks were a cradle of the early abolition and suffrage movements, dating back to the mid-1800's with the establishment of 3000 black suffrage settlements. In the spirit of the opportunities created by that movement, Timbuctoo Summer Climate Careers Institute held its inaugural season in 2023, introducing high school students to careers in the environmental field. The Caucus calls for \$2.1 million in continued funding to keep the program growing.

Supporting 4201 Schools

The Caucus supports \$30 million over three years to close the direct care wage gap in 4201 schools.

Increasing State Aid for Library Construction

Libraries are community institutions that provide wrap-around services that go beyond their mission statements. We must fully recognize their role in working class communities, and provide the structural support needed for libraries to continue providing vital services and resources to New Yorkers. The Caucus supports an increase of \$11 million in funding to better ensure that all New Yorkers continue to have access to state-of-the-art libraries.

Capital Needs of the Indigenous and State Operated Schools

The Caucus supports efforts by SED to ensure that the health and structural needs of Indigenous and State Operated Schools are met as required by the state's constitution. To that end, we support the following investments:

- \$250,000 to conduct Building Condition Surveys (BCS) every five years at the Elementary Schools located in Tuscarora, St. Regis, and Onondaga and the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind.
- capital funding provided on a rolling model based on the maximum cost allowance (MCA) to provide an annual amount of funding, linked to current building square footage and enrollment; and
- funding for each school to meet immediate health and safety needs:
 - Tuscarora Nation School - \$6.6 million
 - Onondaga Nation School - \$11.2 million
 - St. Regis Mohawk Nation School - \$2.3 million
 - Rome School for the Deaf - \$3 million
 - Batavia School for the Blind - \$4.47 million

988 Mental Crisis Line on Student IDs

The Caucus supports addressing the serious issue of suicide among college students by including contact information for mental health resources on their identification cards. With suicide being the second leading cause of death for college students, this initiative aims to raise awareness and ensure quick access to essential resources for those in need.

School Mental Health Professionals

Amid current economic and political uncertainties, there is a rise in stress and worry among families and children due to factors like loss of income, rising debt, unemployment, housing instability, and hunger. The Caucus supports the inclusion of full-time licensed social workers and psychologists in all elementary, intermediate, middle, junior, and senior high schools in New York State. Recognizing the daily challenges children face, having dedicated professionals can help address and prevent long-term problems, ensuring students reach their full potential academically, socially, and emotionally.

Supporting the UFT Teacher Center

For over four decades, the UFT Teacher Center has been a beacon for professional development in NYC school communities. Operating in 118 sites across the city during the 2021-2022 school year, it delivered 126,000 hours of transformative development to over 281,000 participants. The Caucus pushes for an increased budget of \$28.5 million for the statewide expansion of the Teacher Center program.

United Community Schools

The Caucus calls for a \$4 million grant to maintain the existing network of community schools. Furthermore, they advocate for \$100 million in categorical aid for community schools statewide, with a specific \$5 million allocation to United Community Schools for comprehensive technical assistance and support across the state.

An Exhibit on the African American Experience in the Adirondacks

Adirondack Experience (ADKX), a museum in the heart of the Adirondacks, plans to create a permanent exhibition on the history of the African American experience in the Adirondacks, a story that has been overlooked and neglected for too long. A major exhibition will inform Adirondack residents and visitors about the early 19th-century voting rights movement that led Black people to acquire land in the Adirondacks. This exhibit, along with other educational experiences throughout the region, will help foster a more welcoming and inclusive Adirondack Park for residents and visitors alike. The Caucus supports \$3 million to help establish this program.

Continuing Access to the NYS Summer School of the Arts

State funding to ensure that NYSSSA can remain available to all eligible students regardless of financial need and to reduce the negative balance in the Cultural Education account. The Caucus supports \$2 million to ensure continual access to the NYSSSA.

School Gardens and Green Spaces for Learning

The Caucus is advocating for a state investment in school gardens and green spaces for learning in public elementary and secondary schools, especially schools serving disinvested communities of color with limited access to open green spaces. Garden education has been shown to improve academic performance, especially in science and math; increase feelings of safety and healing from trauma; and improve healthy eating attitudes and behaviors. Further, school gardens support more equitable and culturally responsive education as they are welcoming spaces for all types of learners, including English Language Learners. We support \$2 million in new state funding to provide grant funding to schools.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education

A New Deal for CUNY & SUNY

A \$1.7 billion investment, over 5 years, for the SUNY and CUNY systems will fund free tuition for the public university systems, the hiring of more full-time faculty, the establishment of a faculty to student ratio, the hiring of more counselors and mental health professionals, and the creation of a capital plan for the public university systems. The Caucus is advocating for a New Deal for CUNY, in order to establish new pathways for social mobility

Furthermore, the Caucus calls for a designated \$5 million to both CUNY Medgar Evers College as well as York College to make up for long term disinvestments.

Supporting NYS Access and Opportunity Programs

The Caucus is calling for a \$11.1 million increase for the state's higher education opportunity programs, which are available to students attending college and provide access to higher education to students who might not otherwise be able to attend college. Those programs include, the Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), and the Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP)

Improving the Educator Certification Process

The State Education Department has made noted efforts to improve the current teacher and school building leader certification review process time frames including, but not limited to a technology modernization project to maximize automation of the certification process, improving self-service conveniences for applicants, increasing staffing levels in the Office of Teaching Initiatives (OTI). The Caucus urges the Executive to provide access to the entire \$8 million prior year balance to fund and support NYSED's goal of improving the educator certification process.

Enhancing Supports and Services for Postsecondary Success of Students with Disabilities

The Caucus supports \$2 million in funding to support the reasonable accommodation needs and services for individuals with disabilities enrolled at degree granting institutions of higher education.

Foster Youth College Success Initiative

Over the past seven years, the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) has helped approximately 2,000 students primarily with a foster care background attend more than 100 different public and private colleges in New York State. The Caucus is requesting an allocation of \$10 million in the FY 2023-2024 budget, which will assist foster youth, orphans, and wards of the court to apply, attend, and graduate from higher education institutions in the State. Additionally, the Caucus calls on SED and OCFS to prepare posters and pamphlets with information regarding higher education opportunities for foster youth.

Diversity in Medicine

Ensuring diversity in the physician workforce is a key component to improving health outcomes in communities of color. There is a wealth of research demonstrating that diverse physicians and racially concordant health care providers result in better outcomes. A recent study even showed that Black infant mortality rates were cut in half when the treating physician was Black. Diversity in the physician workforce is critical in New York State, and the Caucus supports \$4 million in funding to sustain the program.

District Attorney and Indigent Legal Service Attorney Loan Forgiveness Program

Rising law school tuition and increasing debt loads have driven talented professionals away, resulting in high attrition rates and depriving low-income New Yorkers of experienced representation. That is why the Caucus advocates for an increase in the student loan forgiveness award from \$8,000 per annum for public defenders, district attorneys, and indigent legal service attorneys. The proposed increase aims to alleviate debt burdens and encourage public interest attorneys to continue serving their communities.

Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program

To support New York borrowers, the Caucus supports an allocation of \$3.5 million to the Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP) in FY25 to meet the growing demand for services. This funding will support EDCAP in maintaining helpline capacity and coverage, ensuring continued assistance to borrowers in understanding repayment options, applying for forgiveness programs, and addressing student loan challenges.

Emergency Contraception on College Campuses

According to the Guttmacher Institute study, low income, African American, and women ages 18-24 have disproportionately higher rates of unintended pregnancy. The provision of emergency contraception on city and state campuses is a form of reproductive care which can prevent students from having unintended pregnancies. The Caucus supports requiring each institution within the state university of New York and the city university of New York to have at least one vending machine making emergency contraception available for purchase.

Expand the Educational Incentive Program

The Caucus supports an additional \$3 million through CCDBG professional development allocation to expand the Educational Incentive Program (EIP). The Educational Incentive Program (EIP) provides scholarships for credentialing activities, college credit-bearing coursework, and non-credit bearing training to help childcare workers, including afterschool staff, develop professionally. Currently, the State provides up to \$17.4 million for “services and expenses of childcare scholarships, education and ongoing professional development.

School Psychologist Licensure

The increasing social and emotional needs of students, heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the importance of extending support beyond traditional settings. Post-pandemic, enabling school psychologists to assist children outside conventional contexts is crucial. Expanding the number of trained individuals capable of aiding students beyond school environments will benefit children, parents, schools, and society. School psychologists possess expertise in learning, motivation, and human development, addressing various factors influencing student performance, including school diversity, climate, and community collaboration. Offering prevention services, assessments, and counseling, school psychologists contribute to students' future success. Establishing specific standards and requirements ensures competent services. The Caucus supports the proposal to provide schools with a framework for employing licensed school psychologists, meeting the evolving needs of students and families.

Addressing Affirmative Action

Accelerated Study in Associate Programs

The Caucus supports sustained state funding for evidence-based completion program models Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE), which have been shown in randomized controlled trials to significantly improve associate and bachelor's degree completion rates and help close opportunity gaps. Support includes tuition waivers, funding to help with commuting expenses and textbooks, academic assistance, comprehensive personalized advisement, and career development activities.

Expand Tuition Assistance Program

New York State offers some of the most comprehensive and generous financial assistance programs to support students in pursuing higher education, surpassing other states in the nation. Various financial aid initiatives, including the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), and more, contribute to enabling 53 percent of full-time New York State resident undergraduates to attend college tuition-free. The income threshold for eligibility to receive TAP has remained unchanged since the year 2000, set at \$80,000. The Caucus supports the proposal to align the TAP income eligibility threshold with inflation by raising it to \$110,000. This substantial measure would greatly assist numerous hard-working, middle-class families in affording higher education and attaining upward socioeconomic mobility.

Educational Opportunity Program

Since its inception in 1967, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has provided access, academic support, and supplemental financial assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. In its 55-year history, the EOP has served more than 78,000 students and evolved into one of the country's most successful college access programs. The Caucus calls on the state to expand the eligibility of the and replicate the Pre-Med EOP program by expanding to other professional areas like law and mental health.

Higher Education Opportunity Programs

The Caucus backs the allocation of \$11.1 million for opportunity programs like STEP and CSTEP at the high school level. These programs aim to increase the participation of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students in college, focusing on mathematics, science, technology, health-related fields, and licensed professions. The Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) offers pre-collegiate and dropout prevention programs across diverse communities in NYS. HEOP supports students facing educational and economic challenges, providing academic support, tuition assistance, and financial aid. Additional funding will expand the reach of these programs, benefiting more students.

Extending Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) for Students with Disabilities

The Caucus fervently supports the endeavor to align New York State Law with the Second Circuit Court of Appeals' decision in *A.R. v. Connecticut Board of Education*. This alignment is crucial to ensuring that public schools provide special education and related services to resident students with disabilities until they turn twenty-two. The Caucus, backs \$19.05 million in funding which includes increased reimbursement for public excess cost aid, private excess cost aid, and foundation aid to facilitate the successful implementation of this initiative.

Supporting Educational Providers with Residential Programs

The Caucus stands firmly behind the recommendation to support educational providers with \$19 million in the budget towards residential programs. Recognizing the challenges faced by residential facilities for students receiving special education services, the Caucus endorses the proposed amendments to the statute. These changes seek to make providers whole when tuition cannot be billed due to adult placements, ensuring financial stability for the providers and maintaining availability for residential placements for school-aged students. Moreover, the Caucus advocates for the collaborative efforts of state agencies overseeing such placements to guarantee sufficient residential capacity for all placements in both adult and school-aged settings.

Career and Technical Education

The Caucus supports the Regents' recommendation to address the limitations on career and technical education (CTE) programs. This includes advocating for an increase in the salary limit for BOCES aid to \$60,000 over the next three years. Such support is crucial to encourage the expansion of CTE opportunities and ensure broader accessibility for students. The Caucus also endorses a similar approach to enhance Special Services aids, extending support to students in career, technical, occupational, and business education programs, particularly in districts not affiliated with BOCES, such as the Big Five City school districts.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

HUMAN SERVICES

Nutrition Assistance Programs

No child or vulnerable adult experiencing hunger should lack access to sustenance, particularly fresh and healthy food. Accordingly, it is critical to strengthen food access and security programs by continuing and increasing funding for programs including, but not necessarily limited to Nourish New York, Double Up Food Bucks NY, Wellness in Nutrition (WIN), the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), SNAP Outreach Program, and the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP). Maintain funding of \$5.45M for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York's largest SNAP outreach, education, and application assistance program.

Enhancing SNAP Benefits

Food insecurity is on the rise with recent studies finding that from 2020 to 2022, 2.2 million New York state residents live in food insecure households with 15% being children and 8% being older adults. This disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color. According to the Office of the New York State Comptroller, over the last two years, Black and Hispanic or Latino adult New Yorkers were more likely to report food insufficiency than both white adult New Yorkers and adult New Yorkers overall. Upstate cities including Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester report the highest number of SNAP applications in New York State. The Caucus supports increasing the SNAP minimum monthly benefit from \$23 to \$100.

Investing in Human Services Providers

In 2006, New York State established the Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment, linking annual increases to service provider rates and contracts with inflation. However, this adjustment has consistently been "not withstood," resulting in stagnant provider rates. Agencies supporting vulnerable individuals under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mental Health, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Office of Addiction Services and Supports, Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, and the Office of Children and Family Services require this annual rate increase to sustain operations and address inflationary cost hikes. Therefore, the Caucus supports the inclusion of a 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment, based on the July 2023 CPI-U, in the 2024-25 Budget.

A Livable Wage for Human Services Workers

New York must establish a living wage for all State government contracted human services workers at a rate no less than \$21 an hour, providing pay comparable with government employees holding similar nonprofessional job titles in the human services agencies.

The Caucus also supports establishing a wage and benefit schedule for all government-contracted human services workers to put them on an equal footing with comparable City and State employees. Once established, these compensation benchmarks would be incorporated into all contracts, along with funding to support career advancement and promotion opportunities. The City and State should phase in funding increases to achieve full compensation parity, and immediately establish a reserve for recruitment and retention to stabilize the contracted human services workforce. Moreover, an automatic annual COLA should be incorporated into all human services contracts, not as a substitute for comparable pay but to ensure that pay parity is maintained on a continuing basis. A three percent COLA for workers on New York State contracts, the cost would be \$120 million statewide.

COLA shall be pegged to the consumer price index increase for Human Services Programs including previously omitted OTDA programs (STEHP, NYSHP) and expanded to all titles funded under the contracts.

Raising the Wages of (I/DD) Sector Direct Support Professionals

New York State faces a critical issue affecting the quality of life for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) – the plight of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). Employed by non-profit agencies, DSPs play a vital role in delivering essential services but suffer from persistently low wages due to years of state underinvestment. This has led to a staffing crisis in the I/DD sector, jeopardizing vulnerable New Yorkers.

DSPs, comprise a majority-minority workforce, with 74.2% of DSPs identifying as women and 62.6% DSPs identified as Black, African American, Asian, or Latino. All DSPs undertake multifaceted responsibilities, including skill development, personalized care plans, behavioral support, advocacy, community inclusion, health and safety monitoring, and documentation. Their crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with I/DD and promoting community integration is evident.

As of July 2023, non-profit DSPs earn an average starting wage of \$16.02 per hour statewide, significantly lower than OPWDD-employed DSPs. This wage disparity contributes to a staffing crisis, with non-profit agencies reporting a 17.2% staff vacancy and a 31.1% annual turnover rate.

To address this crisis, the Caucus recommends that the State establish a Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE), providing non-profit agencies with an annual funding allocation of \$4,000 per eligible employee. This initiative aims to increase DSP wages by approximately \$2.00 per hour.

Prioritizing Children & Families

Universal Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services

Universal newborn nurse home visiting will positively affect families and communities historically impacted by systemically inequitable medical practices and economic conditions. Targeting New York's most marginalized, this initiative will close the racial and economic care-gap that has led to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality. Poverty, poor mental and physical health, high juvenile crime rates, adverse childhood experiences, and poor academic performance are prevalent within disadvantaged communities due to systemic inequities built into policy, such as unequal access to healthcare and education.

Newborn nurse home visiting services are not readily available to all enrolled persons covered by insurance. This service is aimed at improving outcomes in one or more of the following: child health and development, school readiness, family financial self-sufficiency, maternal health, positive parenting, reducing adverse childhood experiences, reducing family violence, and reducing crime. This will be achieved through education, promotion of positive interaction between mother and newborn to influence growth and development and offering other guidance to mothers that otherwise would be difficult to afford. The Caucus advocates for an allocation of \$175 million in support of this program.

The Universal Child Care Act

New York's childcare infrastructure is in crisis: many parents have no access to affordable or quality care and many childcare providers earn below the minimum wage. Decades of treating and funding childcare as a private service rather than vital public infrastructure has left the system on the verge of collapse. Although some piecemeal approaches and temporary solutions have kept New York's childcare system on life support, many childcare centers have already been forced to close, and parents are struggling to access the childcare they need. Today, where childcare is still available, it is largely due to a dramatically underpaid workforce overwhelmingly made up of women—especially Black women and women of color—who are paid wages that leave the majority in or near poverty.

The demands of parents and providers for meaningful action on childcare have been ignored for far too long. New York cannot afford to continue to ignore this or to meet it with another band-aid solution. In order to address the crisis on the scale it requires, we need to pass the Universal Child Care Act and move towards a childcare system that is universal, like our public-school system, and which pays our childcare workers at parity with our public-school educators. This will require \$5 billion in this year's budget, including \$3 billion to guarantee childcare subsidies for high-quality and culturally responsive childcare, \$1 billion towards childcare workforce stabilization, \$600 million for a transitional reimbursement rate while we transition towards a system that compensates for the actual cost of childcare, and \$400 million for childcare infrastructure development.

Quality Child Care Workforce Compensation Program

The Caucus supports the creation of a Quality Child Care Workforce Compensation Program. The economics of childcare are such that market forces alone will never be able to adequately fund high-quality care and wages for the sector. For our system to survive, government intervention is required to offer competitive compensation to childcare professionals. Modeled after similar initiatives in Washington, D.C. and New Mexico, this wage enhancement program would offer significant and sustained wage supplements to all licensed and registered providers in New York State as an interim strategy while the NYS Child Care Availability Task Force develops a compensation scale and structure.

Moreover, New York should also follow the lead of New York City and establish a state-funded, statewide Excluded Families Child Care Subsidy program to provide childcare subsidies to immigrant families whose children are barred from accessing federal CCDBG subsidies on the same terms as all other families. All New York families need and deserve childcare in all corners of the state.

Procurement Commission

The state must commit to transformative human services programs, which mean those services that are designed in partnership with providers and communities to get at the root cause of the issues. To do so, New York must undertake a rethinking of the entire procurement system. A start of such an effort would be creating a Procurement Commission that redesigns the procurement system.

The Caucus supports the creation of a Procurement Commission to: focus on clients and outcomes as the well-being of communities that nonprofits serve in how programs are designed and implemented, encourage continuity and competition so that nonprofits of all sizes have access to government contracts, guarantee timely payments that cover the full cost of services so that the sector can focus on delivering high quality programs without the threat to sustainability, create consistency and transparency in processes across all contracting agencies which are currently not aligned in their expectations, communication, and procurement protocols with providers, and support racial and social equity and leverage funding as a direct response to community needs and conditions that produce injustice.

COVID-19 Baby Bonds

Over 16,000 children in New York have lost a parent or caregiver to COVID. To help address these tragic incidents, the Caucus is supporting creating a savings account with \$1,000 for eligible children and \$1,000 added each year of eligibility. The account will be accessible on the child's 18th birthday, and can only be used for education, the purchase of a home, or starting a business.

Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow

Founded in 1983, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT) has served New York City residents by empowering youth and adults from low-income communities through job training, education, employment, and immigration services. The Caucus supports allocating \$500,000 to expand resources for OBT alumni so that they can build wealth, confront NYC's affordability crisis, and secure jobs with higher pay and benefits. By building out their alumni network, providing ongoing career and college counseling and support, and incorporating financial empowerment programming into alumni meetings, OBT can better address structural economic injustice across New York.

Violence Interrupters

The Community Violence Intervention Act that was adopted as part of the 2021-22 state budget included \$10 million to hospital-based violence intervention programs and community-based violence interruption programs and dedicated 10 percent of New York's federally funded Victims of Crime Act funding to these groups in future years. These programs provide a credible, non-police response to gun violence, and have a remarkable track record of success in the communities most vulnerable to gun violence. The Caucus supports the inclusion of \$100 million in capital funding in the FY 2023-2024 budget towards this goal.

Fair Futures

The Caucus supports an increase in the age of eligibility for the Child Welfare Services reimbursement for New York City from age 21 to 26. This would allow New York City to provide more resources to foster youth, using the Fair Futures model, who currently age out of the system and have high rates of poverty and lower career prospects than their peers.

Domestic Violence Funding Remodeling

The Caucus supports the following funding model for Domestic Violence (DV) services: restructuring funding from the per-diem "heads in beds" model to support DV survivors' individual needs and desires and broadening the range of services and options available to them; (2) Integrating funding for residential and non-residential DV services to ensure DV survivors are able to access a variety of services and programs; (3) Establishing and relying on state funding instead of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as the primary funding stream for DV services in order to truly comply with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) provisions; (4) Reducing administrative burdens placed on DV programs; and, (5) Enabling DV programs and DV survivors to determine when a survivor is ready to leave emergency shelter.

Economic Empowerment Program (EEP)

The Caucus supports \$300,000 in operational funding for URI's Economic Empowerment Program (EEP), which is a domestic violence program.

Prioritizing Aging New Yorkers

Automatic Enrollment for SCRIE

Currently, several counties in New York State have established Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) programs. These programs help many low to moderate income seniors remain in their apartments, by assisting them in paying their yearly rent increase, if they are spending more than a third of their monthly income on rent. This is done through providing the renter's landlord with a property tax abatement for the cost of the increase. Programs like SCRIE serve a vital purpose for all seniors who qualify, but many eligible seniors do not know about the program and are unable to reap its benefits, due to lack of outreach. The Caucus requests the inclusion of language authorizing localities and municipalities that have these programs to auto-enroll eligible seniors.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NNORCs) coordinate a broad range of health and social services to help older residents remain in their homes.

Preserving and expanding the NORC program across New York State is essential to keeping our aging population healthy, active, and social beyond the medical programs that support seniors in our communities. In 2017, NYSOFA pledged to fund three new NORC programs in an RFP they later withdrew. We cannot allow this to happen again, and we must ensure that NORC programs receive funding in the coming year. We must also introduce ongoing stable funding for this program and other older adult services.

Our state has a rapidly aging population. N/NORC programs afford older adults a sense of independence and familiarity associated with community-based programs that are irreplaceable. N/NORCs are vital to New York's aging population and act as preventative care, keeping our seniors at home and in their communities and helping the state maintain its designation as an age-friendly state. The Caucus supports the continued support for N/NORCs and their services by further investing an additional \$1 million in the budget, for a total of \$9.055 million for the program.

Community Services for the Elderly

The Community Services for the Elderly program provides community-based, supportive services to frail, low-income older adults who need assistance to maintain their independence at home. CSE has effectively been a state block grant that enables localities to determine specific unmet needs and shape the way the delivery system is organized to respond, giving them considerable flexibility within the general parameters of the program's intent and goals. The Caucus advocates for at least 10 million per year in perpetuity to close the wait list for community services for the elderly (CSE)

Strengthening Social Safety Net

Community & Family Reinvestment Act (CFRA)

The Caucus supports amending the Social Services Law 131-a to grant a six-month 100 percent earned income disregard to individuals who, due to securing work as the result of participating in a post-secondary educational or training program, would otherwise become ineligible for benefits. The resulting loss of various benefits at the very moment that someone is re- entering the workforce is ill timed.

The Community & Family Reinvestment Act (CFRA) is an opportunity to transform child welfare by centering families and fully funding multiple tiers of prevention. Racism, sexism, and classism are woven into the child welfare system in New York, and even though there have been significant and impressive decreases in the number of children in foster care, the rates of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children in care compared to white children are alarming and must be addressed. The Caucus calls for the implementation of CFRA, which is composed of 4 main components: (1) Restore the child welfare funding statute to 65/35 cost share structure between the state and counties (2) Create a primary prevention fund, where all allocated resources are used for primary prevention to ensure families do not encounter the child welfare system (3) Remove the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program from the Foster Care Block Grant and fund it separately at \$25 million. (4) Increase the child welfare housing voucher from \$300/month to \$725/month to support reunification and independent living.

Social and Child Welfare Funding

The two percent spending cap has had a chilling effect on social welfare agency spending in New York. In the last fiscal year, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Division of Human Rights (DHR) saw the largest decreases in state operating funds. Since 2011, all agencies have seen significant decreases, but OCFS, DHR, and the Division of Homes and Community Renewal (DHCR) have seen the largest decreases at 38 percent, 51 percent, and 36 percent, respectively. Funding reported for social welfare agencies has fluctuated since 2011 with some financing and some accounting changes, but overall funding is decreasing for these agencies

Families First Transition Fund

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), signed into law in early 2018, represents a fundamental shift in the national approach to child welfare. Recognizing the importance of family in child development, federal law now emphasizes the importance of both keeping children safely with their families whenever possible and ensuring that children are in family-based care when foster care becomes necessary. In order to ensure that FFPSA implementation is effective, New York State and its counties must be proactive: the state should prepare now by improving policies and practices to recruit, retain, and strengthen foster and kinship families, and evaluate its current use of residential care. The Caucus supports an allocation of \$7.5 million over the next three years to adequately fund this effort.

Delivering Social Services for New Yorkers

The Caucus calls for the reform of the delivery of social services and reinvent poverty policy in New York State by creating pilot projects to enable low-income people to: 1) simultaneously access multiple government benefits and nonprofit services digitally; 2) save money in a non-taxable account that could be used to pay for future education, job training, first home purchases, or small business start-ups; and 3) integrate the above with free or low-cost banking and/or credit union services.

Public Assistance grant amounts have not been updated in decades and the allowance for rent has not been updated in over 10 years. Both have fallen well below inflation. Data from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development indicates that there are no apartments that meet basic housing quality standards in the private rental market available at rents equal to the shelter allowance. The Caucus supports increasing the rent allowance to be in line with HUD's Fair Market Rents to help the lowest-income New Yorkers obtain and retain safe and decent housing, thereby reducing housing instability and homelessness.

Strengthening the Social Workforce

New York State faces simultaneous social crises, including increased immigration, rising homelessness, and a mental health and overdose crisis, particularly impacting communities of color. Social workers, with 80% serving in these communities, play a crucial role in delivering essential services. To effectively address these challenges, New York needs a large, competent, and diverse social work workforce, as research shows the effectiveness of professionals who understand and reflect the experiences of their clients.

To overcome barriers to expanding the mental health workforce, it's essential to address obstacles preventing diverse social workers from becoming clinicians. Therefore, the Caucus calls on the state to license social workers at the MSW entry level who meet all state requirements for licensure except the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exam.

Legal Representation for Wrongfully Denied/Terminated Federal Disability Benefits

Signed into state law in 1983, the Disability Advocacy Program (DAP) provides legal representation to low-income disabled New Yorkers whose federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability (SSD) benefits have been wrongly denied or terminated. In December 2017, The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that Social Security claimants with legal representatives were nearly three times more likely to be awarded benefits as those without. DAP saves the state millions of dollars in avoided public assistance costs by helping disabled New Yorkers receive federal benefits. To protect our neighbors with disabilities, the Caucus calls for a total of \$6.76 million in state funds (\$5.26 million from Executive, \$1.5 million from Legislature) which, when matched by counties, will provide a total of \$13.52 million that will help disabled New Yorkers obtain needed benefits.

Flattening Public Benefits Cliffs

The Caucus supports measures to help working New Yorkers gradually transition off public benefits rather than face punitive withdrawals as they work to achieve self-sufficiency. The FY 2023-2024 enacted budget included authorization for social services districts to provide a six-month 100% earned income disregard to New Yorkers completing a state or federal job training program and re-entering the workforce. The authorization came with a caveat that disqualifies individuals earning over 200% of the federal poverty level. The six-month 100% earned income disregard is intended to help workers achieve economic security; and disqualifying individuals earning above minimum wage or 200% FPL will provide little assistance to these New Yorkers.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

LABOR & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Labor

Statewide Youth Employment Program

The Caucus calls for state investment of \$1 billion in a year-round employment and work readiness program for young New Yorkers aged 16-24. Participants will be able to explore different interests and career pathways, develop productive workplace habits, and engage in learning experiences that strengthen their social, civic, and leadership skills.

Civil Exam Study

The Caucus supports efforts to direct the department of civil service to conduct a study on competitive examinations for public employment held by the state department of civil service and by municipal commissions to determine whether the contents of such examinations have a discriminatory effect on minority examinees.

Temporary Disability Insurance Program

The current Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program, stagnant since 1949, lacks crucial employment and healthcare protections, offering inadequate income support with a capped benefit of \$170 per week. The Caucus calls for updating TDI by raising the benefit cap, implementing progressive wage replacement up to 90% of an employee's average weekly wage, and expanding coverage to include all pregnancy outcomes. This urgency is emphasized for women and birthing individuals, with around 30% of health-related benefit claims tied to pregnancy outcomes. By aligning TDI with paid family leave benefits, New York can empower vulnerable communities and ensure New Yorkers don't have to choose between health and financial stability, providing overdue protections against adversity.

Clean Slate Support

Once an individual's "debt to society" is paid, justice demands that the individual not be punished further in connection with employment, housing, obtaining credit, and many additional areas essential for successful participation in one's community.

The recently signed Clean Slate Act allows formerly incarcerated individuals to move on with their lives and not be punished in perpetuity. It aims to end perpetual punishment by requiring the concealing of certain records subject to a variety of conditions and exceptions, making it illegal and a violation of Human Rights to unlawfully disseminate any information that has been concealed. For the effective and timely implementation of this law, we are requesting sufficient funds to be allocated to the appropriate agencies. The Caucus will continue to work with the executive and advocate for this critical allocation

Unemployment Bridge Program

After the creation of a first-in-the-nation \$2.1 billion fund that reached more than 131,000 workers excluded from unemployment and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the Legislature and Governor must now ensure permanent inclusion in the unemployment system for all. The Caucus urges the inclusion of this proposal in the enacted budget to establish a permanent unemployment insurance program in New York State that can be accessed by excluded workers who currently contribute to social safety net programs but are excluded from traditional unemployment insurance. \$800 million will create the first ever Unemployment Bridge Program, which will provide up to \$1200/month in economic support to workers ineligible for unemployment. Prime beneficiaries will be undocumented immigrant workers, cash economy workers, freelancers, and other types of excluded workers. This program can serve up to 50,000 people a month. Additionally, this program can be funded with revenue generated from the implementation of a digital ad tax.

Mental Health Support in the Workplace

The Caucus supports the proposal to instruct the Department of Labor to develop and distribute written materials for employers about mental health services and resources for posting in the workplace. Additionally, the proposal encourages voluntary guidance for employers to implement strategies and programs supporting the mental health and wellness of employees. The guidance is expected to be available in both written and digital formats, catering to English speakers and, where applicable, translated into additional primary languages.

Telemedicine for Injured Workers

Recognizing the challenges faced by injured workers, the Caucus urges the state to grant injured workers the ability to receive necessary treatment through telemedicine, particularly for mental and behavioral health needs resulting from workplace injuries. This initiative ensures equitable access to care for all New Yorkers injured in the workplace, regardless of their location.

Liability for Unpaid Unemployment Insurance

Under current law, the Department of Labor can hold corporations, sole proprietors, and some partners liable for unpaid UI contributions, but does not have authority to hold officers of such corporations or members of LLCs individually liable. Based on historical patterns, approximately \$35 million per year in unpaid UI contributions is assigned inactive collection status due to the inability to collect from out-of-business corporations, LLCs, and partnerships who abandon their debt. The ability to collect against corporate officers, members or managers of limited liability companies, and certain partners would significantly decrease this amount and have a positive effect on the UI Trust Fund. Extending this liability would serve as a deterrent against unscrupulous employers who evade paying their fair share of UI contributions by closing a business and setting up a new corporation, limited liability company, or partnership.

Reclassifying Certain Claimants in the Workers' Compensation Law

Workers' Compensation boards are currently mandated to provide extreme hardship benefits to recipients whose household incomes are less than 75 percent of an average weekly wage upon termination of the disability benefits. Extreme hardship can be applied for within a year of workers' compensation recipient's benefits being extinguished. The workers' compensation board currently defines extreme hardship as the inability to meet household bills considering the injured worker's income as well as that of other household members. The Caucus supports efforts that make it easier for a worker to earn extreme hardship by redefining lost wage-earning capacity at 50 percent instead of 75 percent. This will be especially helpful to workers who are older who might opt into their social security benefits earlier without a larger worker compensation benefit package.

Empire State Licensing Act

The Caucus is advocating for access to professional licensing for New York's undocumented individuals. State and City fees and taxable revenue will provide crucial cash flow to our fiscally struggling governments. Similar bills passed in Nevada and New Jersey provided undocumented immigrants a feasible pathway toward sustainable jobs and careers.

Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations Programming

- \$5M for Cornell ILR's Climate Jobs Institute
- \$400K for Cornell University Prison Education and Employment Transitions Program
- \$300K for Yang-Tan Institute (YTI) to advance equal workforce opportunities for people with disabilities
- \$500,000 appropriation to the Department of Labor to fund a community enforcement initiative for domestic work
- \$1.4M for New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations
 - \$600,000 for the Worker Institute (WI) at Cornell ILR
 - \$300,000 for the NYS AFL-CIO / Cornell Union Leadership Institute
 - \$500,000 for the Workplace Sexual Harassment / Gender-based Violence Awareness Program



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

“A Demand for Justice”

LABOR & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development

Black Farmers United of New York State

Institutional and structural racism have led to inequitable access to agriculture and food – this is resulting in ongoing health conditions and difficulties with quality of life for Black consumers as well as farmers, whose numbers have depleted in New York- leaving only 139 out of over 50,000 New York farmers. The Caucus is calling for a \$30 million allocation to Black Farmers United of New York State.

Continued funding for Black Farmers United NYS and for the Urban Farming and Community Garden Grant Program will assist farms and food businesses owned by people of color and create pathways to ownership for NYS Black farmers through education, policy development, and mutual aid.

Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive Program

The Caucus supports increased funding for the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive program which incentivizes schools that spend at least 30% of total meal costs on New York foods served at school meal and expanding the program to include reimbursement for breakfast (in addition to lunch) will help to support New York farmers, generate nearly an additional half of a billion dollars in economic impact, and increase access to healthy food for students.

Supporting Small Businesses

MWBE Center

To support MWBE owners navigating certification processes, procurement, and growth, the Caucus calls for the creation of a downstate MWBE Center that will bring in-person services closer to home for thousands of businesses. In addition to reducing barriers to certification, the Center, by improving access to Empire State Development's Division of Minority and Women's Business Development (DMWBD) services and other resources, will ensure the state continues to improve on its MWBE utilization goals and allows for a better lens to effectively diversify its procurement partners. Funding of the MWBE Center will create a one-stop-shop, with resources on existing federal, state, and local programs under one roof, like the newly passed MWBE reciprocity between the state and New York City.

Small Business Security Fund

The Small Business Security Grant will provide funding support for physical security enhancements and activities to small businesses, including bodegas and grocery stores, at a high risk for crime. The program also intends to integrate business and agency preparedness activities, and to promote coordination and collaboration amongst businesses and agencies in emergencies. The Caucus supports establishing a Small Business Security Grant Fund to assist small businesses, including critical bodegas and grocery stores, in meeting security needs.

Small Business and Nonprofit Rent Relief and Support

For many small businesses and nonprofits, rent payments, even in a favorable economic climate, present a burden. During the unprecedented economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these tenants are suffering because of state mandates, forcing them to close and/or curtail their operations. The Caucus supports tax credits to local and small businesses and a federal and state legal services program to support small businesses and nonprofits.

Culture & Arts

BIPOC Artist Funding

New York's working artists and performers are uniquely vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true for artists of color, who are underpaid and often expected to build their career on the promise of exposure instead of remuneration. These recent hardships, combined with structural and economic inequality, prevent artists of color from contributing their talents to our communities. The Caucus recommends additional investment to the New York Council of the Arts for a new grant program focused on commissioning BIPOC artists and institutions across the state for public art projects.

Additionally, an allocation of \$50,000 for the National Black Theatre Inc.

New York 250 Commission

The Caucus emphasizes the urgent need for New York to establish and fund a commission in preparation for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. While several states have active commissions, New York remains without one. The Caucus calls for funding to enable museums, historical societies, historic sites, and battlefields to share their cultural resources. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating the stories of Indigenous Nations, BIPOC communities, and new Americans.

Expanding Public Access to Institutions of Culture and Arts

New York City boasts some of the globe's most prominent museums, zoos, performing arts centers, botanical gardens, and more, courtesy of an extraordinary public-private partnership established in the mid-19th century. This unique collaboration offers complimentary access and instruction to New Yorkers in return for spaces in structures constructed on City-owned parkland. Presently, seventeen institutions reap the advantages of this partnership, securing over \$1 billion in annual funding. The Caucus strongly encourages Empire State Development, in coordination with various departments and offices, to initiate a study focused on enhancing public access to these various institutions across New York State.

New York State Public Bank

This proposal would establish a State of New York Public Bank to use public funds for the public good and increase access to credit and capital in underbanked and/or economically disadvantaged communities. A public bank is a financial institution created by the state for a "public benefit" of the community. The Bank of North Dakota, founded in 1919, is currently the only public bank that exists in the United States. Since 2010, 28 states have passed legislation to establish a public banking taskforce or to create a public bank in their state. The State of California enacted a law in 2019 allowing municipalities to form a public bank.

The Caucus advocates for a New York Public Bank for the purpose of achieving cost savings, strengthening local economies, supporting community economic development, and addressing infrastructure and housing needs for localities.

New York Public Banking Act

The Caucus advocates for the creation of a safe and appropriate regulatory framework for municipalities seeking to establish public banks. This would allow the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to issue special-purpose public bank charters. A public bank is a financial institution created by a city, county, town, or village for a "public benefit" of the community. The public bank could exist in communities that have little to no access to banking services. The public bank could fund local projects at a reduced cost, generate profits for local government, and create low-cost credit/loans to small businesses, MWBEs and/or student loans to low-income families.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

CIVIL RIGHTS & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Civil Rights

Reparations

The New York City Comptroller released a groundbreaking report exposes alarming racial wealth disparities in New York State and City, examining the historical legacies of slavery and institutional racism. Released on the 13th Amendment's anniversary, the report highlights a staggering racial wealth gap in the state. White households, with a median income of \$276,900, surpass Black households by almost 15 times (\$18,870). Educational disparities persist, with white New Yorkers having over three times the net worth of Black New Yorkers with a bachelor's degree. Homeownership, a key wealth-building avenue, remains challenging for Black families, with only 24% owning homes compared to 63% of white residents. The Caucus emphasizes the urgency of addressing these disparities, recognizing their profound societal consequences. The membership continues to support the mission of the New York State Reparations Commission.

Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements

Historically, racial disparities persist in New York's correctional system, despite efforts to reduce the overall prison population through alternative programs. The enactment of race-neutral legislation can unintentionally harm minority populations. To address this, the Caucus advocates for the inclusion of racial impact statements in the legislative and rule-making process, aiming to prevent disproportionate impacts on communities of color. This model would require all bills, amendments, and rules to be accompanied by a racial impact statement, promoting transparency and equity in policymaking.

Expand Funding for Parental Representation Cases

The Caucus advocates for New York State to invest \$28 million in parental representation. Despite decades of research, hearings and reports describing the crisis in family court representation, New York has failed to protect families. The Caucus calls on the state to act now by assuring parents facing these racially disparate and harsh systems have an attorney and other resources to protect their families from unwarranted separation and prevent unnecessary removal of children from their families and cultures

Uplifting New Americans

Access to Representation Act

The Caucus supports \$100 million in funding for the Access to Representation Act, which ensures a right to counsel for all immigrants facing deportation in New York and provides stable funding for immigration legal services. No individual in our country should have to defend themselves against trained attorneys without proper counsel to protect themselves, and their families, against deportation.

Immigration Services Funding

In support of the Office for New Americans the Caucus calls for a total of \$150 million in operating funds. Additionally, the Caucus supports the allocation of \$15.3 million, from its current \$10 million for immigration legal services and \$9.1 million to the Office for New Americans to ensure New Yorkers who face complex immigration issues have access to proper legal help and support.

New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)

Since 2017, NYIFUP has ensured legal representation for detained individuals facing deportation in New York, making it the first state to provide such a guarantee. Unlike criminal cases, those facing deportation lack a public defender, making NYIFUP crucial. Nationwide, 81% of detained individuals navigate immigration court alone. NYIFUP's impact is evident, with represented immigrants being 3.5 times more likely to be released and 10 times more likely to prove their right to stay. To maintain this critical service, the Caucus supports a budgetary allocation of \$6.5 million.

Alex R. Jimenez New York State Military Immigrant Family Legacy Program

Those in the armed forces demonstrate patriotism and perseverance for democratic values that enhance our communities. The Caucus supports an efficient program to expedite the naturalization process for veterans and current service members, ensuring proper acknowledgment for their contributions. This initiative covers all veterans, irrespective of sexual orientation or immigration status.

Expand Language Access

The Caucus supports \$10 million in the 2024-2025 New York State Executive Budget for Language Access Expansion. This would improve access to language services for immigrant communities located outside of New York City and support the provisions of the bill. Of the amount requested, \$5M would fund the development of learning language services cooperatives; \$3M would increase the base funding for the New York State Office of Language Access; and \$2M would fund the training of community interpreters, the assessment of regional language needs, and the retention of interpreters.

Safeguarding Voting Rights

Voting Accessibility for College Students

The Caucus supports legislation that would provide college and university campuses (with large concentrations of voters) with their own election districts and their own poll sites. This initiative recognizes that requiring residents of colleges and universities to vote at remote sites can present unnecessary obstacles to voting. Additionally, it would provide that election districts shouldn't be drawn in a way that they are partly on and partly off a college or university campus and would require that the poll sites for election districts serving such considerations of college or university voters shall be on the campus or college or university property, or some other site approved by the college or university.

Same Day Voter Registration

The Caucus supports legislation which would authorize individuals qualified to register to vote, and who have missed the deadlines for voter registration prior to an election, to complete a conditional voter registration and cast an affidavit ballot which would then be canvassed when such registration was deemed eligible and valid by the board of elections. This would give thousands of individuals who would otherwise be ineligible to vote on election day, or during early voting, the opportunity to vote.

Enfranchisement

Under current New York law, individuals who are on parole are prohibited from voting. There are about 30,000 people on parole at any given time in New York; and both here and across the country, the criminal disenfranchisement laws disproportionately impact people of color. Nearly three-quarters of New Yorkers on parole are Black or Latino. One out of every 24 Black voters in New York is disenfranchised; and this policy is firmly rooted in historical racism, dating back to a 19th century statute.

Additionally, New York law does allow individuals on probation to vote. There is no reason for this distinction between probation and parole. This distinction has caused widespread confusion among formerly incarcerated people and elected officials, leading to de facto disenfranchisement when individuals who are permitted to vote think that they are not.

Lorena Borjas Trans Wellness and Equity Fund

To sustain funding for the initiative, the Caucus is calling for an allocation \$2 million from the state to continue this first in the nation program and serve community-based non-profits.



2024 PEOPLE'S BUDGET FRAMEWORK

"A Demand for Justice"

CIVIL RIGHTS & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Criminal Justice

Protecting Discovery Reforms

The Caucus adheres to holding the line on discovery reforms and will not support changes to CPL article 245 (Discovery). Additionally, the Caucus calls for continued increased funding for defender discovery, which is essential for successful discovery implementation.

Office of Re-entry Services

The creation of a central Office of Re-entry Services, established within the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to establish an office to oversee and facilitate the creation and promotion of programs and resource-sharing that improve re-entry success and reduce likelihood of recidivism. The 25,000 incarcerated persons released in New York each year need to earn a living, legally. Currently, 2 out of 5 people to be released from state prison return to New York City predestined to be homeless. Studies show that re-entry programs, including substance abuse and mental health treatment improve reintegration numbers markedly. Overseen by a task-force system, existing re-entry services only accommodate and reach a small fraction of those who need the services. Establishing a comprehensive re-entry program for incarcerated people, run by DCJS, and beginning during incarceration, is a necessary step toward a criminal justice system that keeps all New Yorkers safe.

End Predatory Court Fees

Fees (or surcharges) are extra costs that the government attaches to every conviction — even traffic tickets and minor infractions. They can total hundreds of dollars (not including the amount of any fine imposed). Individuals are often required to pay fees on top of a fine, or in many cases, even when the judge decides not to impose a fine at all. These court fees are explicitly intended as revenue raisers; they function as a form of regressive taxation on New Yorkers that are often the least able to afford them. Predatory fines and fees encourage policing-for-profit, criminalize poverty, and endanger Black and brown lives. New Yorkers deserve to live without fear of lifelong debt and poverty, and they deserve a fair, transparent government. The Caucus is calling for an end to New York's predatory court fees.

Parole Reform

Reentry reform must address how people accused of violating parole are adjudicated. The fact remains that people accused of violating conditions of their parole are contributing to mass incarceration in New York prisons and local jails. Many people under parole supervision in New York are returned to prison, and most of those people are re-incarcerated on technical violations, not rearrest. People accused of violating parole are the only population seeing a growth in numbers in New York City jails.

New York State has a crisis of aging and dying behind bars because of extreme sentences and blanket, racially biased denials of parole release. In New York prisons, 15% of people are age 55 or older, and this number is rapidly growing. Many were locked up as young people but lack pathways to be fairly considered for release, no matter how much they have matured and transformed themselves. Incarcerated elders and others serving long sentences have created the most effective anti-violence programs and, when released, [go on to serve as non-profit leaders, mentors, peer counselors and more to improve community safety for all](#); they also have the lowest recidivism rates. Without reforms to expand access to parole release and make the process more fair in New York State, New Yorkers, especially those who are Black and Latino, will continue to age without dignity, get sick, and die in prison regardless of their transformation and potential benefits to the outside community. *If New York State's prison system were a country, a life expectancy of 57 would rank it among the bottom 10 in the world.*

True reentry reform must include shortening parole terms overall, incentivizing good behavior by allowing people to earn accelerated discharge, creating a high legal threshold for jailing people on parole for minor offenses and expediting their hearings, and not jailing people for technical violations. For this reason, the Caucus supports the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole measures, which would require the Board of Parole to release people to community supervision when their period of incarceration has finished unless they pose a clear threat to public safety. Moreover, the Caucus supports eliminating the \$30 parole fee parolees are required to pay once a month.

Increase Transparency in State Correctional Facilities

The Correctional Association of New York (CANY) has played a pivotal role since its establishment in 1846, granted authority by the Legislature to visit prisons and shed light on conditions of confinement for the Legislature and the public. In 2021, crucial advancements were made to enhance CANY's monitoring capabilities through legislation that solidified its authority to visit, access, inspect, and report on state prisons. This legislation empowers CANY to visit any state prison with 72 hours' notice to the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). CANY can confidentially communicate with incarcerated individuals and department staff, operate a hotline for reporting prison conditions, distribute surveys to incarcerated people, and disseminate reports and recommendations to the state's executive, legislature, DOCCS, and the public. To fortify CANY's critical mission, the Caucus strongly advocates for the allocation of \$500,000 in support, recognizing the indispensable role it plays in ensuring transparency, accountability, and advocating for the rights of incarcerated individuals.

Increasing Prisoner Wages and Providing Free Services

While some inmates receive financial support from families, many rely on earnings from prison work. These funds contribute to restitution, court fees, and personal needs. Recognizing the incentive provided by wages, the Caucus advocates for raising the base wage for inmates to \$1.20 - \$10 a day, with biannual raises for good performance. Those not participating in work or programs due to age or frailty should receive \$1.00 per day, adjusted every 5 years for the cost of living. Additionally, the Caucus supports enabling incarcerated individuals to send up to 10 free electronic mail letters a day, promoting affordable communication with their families.

Treatment Not Jails

New York must finally begin to address the root causes of criminal legal system involvement. The Treatment Not Jail Act will level the field of judicial diversion and create steps toward ending the criminalization of mental health challenges and functional impairments in New York. Treatment Not Jail will create parity in the system for all vulnerable populations who need support and opportunity, and promote public safety by opening avenues of appropriate, individualized treatment where there are now only pathways to incarceration. New York's treatment courts currently receive a budget of between \$15,000,000 - \$16,000,000 per year. Thus, the Caucus supports an additional budget allocation of \$16,000,000 should help to accommodate the training and bureaucratic adjustment required to implement this initiative, as well as the expected influx of new eligible participants. While this effort comes with an up-front cost, there will be significant cost-savings in the long run, since treatment courts are widely recognized as a highly cost-effective approach to public safety. According to the Office of Court Administration, for every \$1 invested in treatment courts, the state produces \$2.21 in benefits. This savings is especially urgent in New York City, where taxpayers spend over \$556,000 per year for the incarceration of a single individual.

Wrongful Conviction Reform (440)

New York State ranks third in the nation in numbers of wrongful convictions. Our state also has an extremely high rate of plea bargaining- 98 percent of felony cases in our state resolve by plea agreements, not trial. Yet people who plead guilty have the lowest rates of exonerations because there are so many structural barriers to exoneration after a guilty plea, even when those pleas are falsely made under coercion and duress. The Caucus supports efforts to amend Article 440 of the Criminal Procedure Law, which governs post-judgement motions, to provide people previously convicted of crimes the opportunity for meaningful review to ensure redress for wrongful convictions, including in cases where the person pled guilty. Additionally, we are calling for at least \$10 million in state funds to help the judicial system handle any influx of new applications for relief.

Prisoners' Legal Services

Since 1976, Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS) has played a vital role in making New York prisons safer and more humane. Their work has resulted in positive changes in prisoners' attitudes and behavior and has promoted constructive policy and programmatic modifications within DOCCS. PLS' work has also benefited the state Attorney General's Office and state and federal court judges by providing professional legal representation. The Caucus recommends that PLS be allocated a combined \$4 million from the legislature in the SFY 2022-23 budget.

Support for Public Defenders

The Caucus advocates New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA), provide comprehensive legal support to all public defense lawyers across the state who represent low-income people in the state's criminal and family court systems. The Backup Center serves approximately 6,000 attorneys in more than 130 county-based programs.