

New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, & Asian Legislative Caucus

# The People's Budget BUDGET EQUITY XXXIII

Assemblywoman Michaelle C. Solages, Chair



## Agency and Action



Caucus Budget Co-Chairs

Assemblymember Brian Cunningham • Assemblymember Manny De Los Santos  
Senator Jeremy Cooney • Senator Robert Jackson



## **New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus**

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## 2025 People's Budget - Budget Equity XXXIII: Agency and Action

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**Message from the Caucus Chair**  
**Assemblymember Michaelle C. Solages**  
**SFY 2025-2026**

As Chair of the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus, I am proud to present **The People’s Budget – Budget Equity XXXIII: Agency & Action**. This year’s budget is a call for bold leadership and real solutions that uplift our communities and drive lasting change.

This vision demands that New York take real steps toward an equitable future for communities of color, built on long-term, generational solutions. We need policies that dismantle racial and economic barriers and create real opportunities for all New Yorkers—not just promises, but action.

From expanding universal school meals, strengthening maternal healthcare, and improving access to nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC, our members are focused on delivering real wins for working families. Families across the state are struggling, and these measures provide critical support to help keep them afloat. Pairing these efforts with early literacy programs like Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library reinforces our commitment to ensuring children have the resources they need to succeed from the start. But relief alone is not enough—we must create clear pathways to financial security and economic mobility that empower New Yorkers to not just survive, but thrive.

Housing remains a crisis, and affordability must be at the center of the conversation. The Executive is right—we need to build more housing. But simply increasing supply without ensuring affordability will not stop the exodus of working families being priced out of their own communities. Our members are clear: any housing plan must include strong protections and affordability measures that keep New Yorkers in their homes.

Finally, we cannot ignore the glaring inequities in New York’s tax system. The state cannot deliver on its promises—to fund childcare, housing, the MTA, and climate action—without fair revenue solutions. The wealthiest individuals and largest corporations continue to benefit from a system designed to protect their interests, while working-class and middle-class New Yorkers shoulder the burden. If we are serious about building a stronger, more equitable state, we must demand that the wealthiest pay their fair share.

The Caucus stands firm in our fight for a budget that reflects our values, meets the needs of our communities, and delivers real, lasting change. Now is the time for bold leadership and decisive action—New York cannot afford to wait.



**Message from the State Budget Subcommittee Co-Chairs  
Senator Jeremy Cooney, Senator Robert Jackson,  
Assemblymember Manny De Los Santos, and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham  
SFY 2025-2026**

**The People’s Budget – Budget Equity XXXIII: Agency & Action** represents a pivotal moment for New York. Our state stands at a crossroads, and this budget is about more than policy—it is about delivering real, measurable results for working families and underserved communities. This year’s plan is rooted in bold action and structural change, with a clear focus on breaking down long-standing inequities.

New Yorkers continue to face skyrocketing housing costs and an escalating affordability crisis. This budget confronts these issues directly by advocating for expanded rental assistance, tax relief for working families, and increased investments in education, healthcare, and economic mobility. These measures are not just about funding programs; they are about creating a state that works for everyone—not just the wealthy and well-connected. In a year of heightened federal scrutiny, New York must take action to empower its residents and protect communities.

Too often, budget decisions are made behind closed doors, disconnected from the struggles of everyday New Yorkers. The People’s Budget puts communities at the center—creating a collaborative process that ensures New Yorkers can shape the policies that impact their lives. From ensuring legal representation for immigrants to strengthening food security through SNAP4All, this approach is driven by grassroots support and guided by the priorities of those most affected by systemic challenges.

Budgets define priorities. This year, we are demanding a budget that reflects justice, fairness, and shared prosperity. We thank our colleagues, advocates, and community members who have raised their voices throughout this process. Now, we must push forward together to turn these priorities into action and build a stronger, more equitable New York for all.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**We would like to express special appreciation to all the Caucus members, legislative staff, advocates, and everyday New Yorkers who have contributed to this publication. Without their talents and commitment, this would not have been possible.**

Joshua Joseph, Caucus Executive Director  
Vishnu Kalantri, Caucus Communications Coordinator

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Office of Senator Jeremy Cooney  
Office of Senator Robert Jackson  
Office of Assemblymember Manny De Los Santos  
Office of Assemblymember Brian Cunningham  
New York State Assembly Editorial Services  
New York State Assembly Graphics Department  
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**We thank all New Yorkers for their continued advocacy to improve the quality of our state. Their efforts greatly contributed to the content of this document.**





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: BUDGET & REVENUE

**Inflation Refund:** The Executive proposes to create a one-time \$3 billion inflation refund credit for certain taxpayers filing jointly with incomes below \$300,000, or incomes below \$150,000 for single filers. Eligible taxpayers filing jointly would receive a \$500 credit, and eligible single filers would receive a \$300 credit. The credit would be provided as an advanced payment in calendar year 2025.

**Middle Class Tax Cut:** The Executive proposes to provide a low- and middle-income tax cut for certain taxpayers with incomes below \$323,200. The tax rate reduction would be phased in over two years, and would provide \$1 billion in savings for taxpayers when fully phased in.

**Enhanced Empire State Child Credit for Three Years:** The Executive proposes to enhance the Empire State Child Tax Credit program for three years, by increasing the maximum credit to \$1,000 for qualifying children under four years old for Tax Years 2025 to 2027, and \$500 for qualifying children aged 4 to 16 for Tax Years 2026 and 2027.

**Extend the Temporary Personal Income Tax (PIT) High Income Surcharge for Five Years:** The Executive proposes to extend the current PIT surcharge for high-income earners for an additional five years, through Tax Year 2032.

**Extend and Amend the Film Tax Credit:** The Executive proposes to extend the Empire State film production and post-production credits for an additional two years, through 2036; remove the tiered payout structure for new applicants; enhance the post-production tax credit program; provide an additional ten percent tax credit for certain recurring productions; remove certain restrictions on above-the-line qualified costs; and create a new \$100 million Empire State Independent Film Production program.

**Waiting Period Restriction and Limit Deductions on Institutional Real Estate Investors:** The Executive proposes to disallow the sale of single- and two-family homes to certain covered entities, including institutional investors, unless the property has been on the market for at least 75 days. The proposal would also provide various consumer protection provisions, establish penalties, and prohibit the depreciation tax and interest tax deductions from such homes if purchased by covered entities.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

*"Agency & Action"*

### BUDGET & REVENUE

The Fiscal Policy Institute's report in its state migration series, "Who Is Leaving New York State? Social and Labor Characteristics", which finds that affordability — and in particular housing and the cost of raising a family — are increasingly driving State population loss.



**Affordability — in particular housing and the cost of raising a family — is increasingly driving NYS population loss:**

- Households with young children are 40% more likely to leave the state than households without young children — and twice as likely to move out of New York City.
- 36% of households leaving New York State are moving in search of more affordable housing — more than twice the share before Covid.
- 90% of New York State's population loss is driven by New York City, the most expensive part of the state.
- The highest income New Yorkers leave the State at lower rates than all other income brackets (see FPI's migration series, part I).

**Black and Hispanic New Yorkers are leaving NYS at higher rates:**

- Black New Yorkers are leaving New York State at more than 50% the rate of white New Yorkers — a pattern reflecting the fact that 85% of state out-migration is from New York City, which has a disproportionate number of Black residents relative to the state as a whole.
- Hispanic New Yorkers have become increasingly likely to leave, with out-migration rates 38% higher than white New Yorkers in the years since the pandemic.

## **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 but are not limited to a Qualified IV-A Recipient, Veteran, Ex-Felon, Designated Community Resident, and Qualified Long-Term Unemployment Recipient. The Caucus supports a state WOTC to promote higher disadvantaged New Yorkers.

## **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.

## **Reform the Estate Tax, or Tax Inherited Income**

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. To address this issue, the Caucus proposes a multifaceted approach. Members 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.

## **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 2025-2026 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.

## **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. 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. 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**

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.

### **Ammunition Tax**

To ensure sufficient funds for individuals and organizations actively involved in addressing gun violence at the grassroots level, the Caucus supports the proposal to establish an excise tax on ammunition, with 100% of the revenue earmarked for supporting gun violence intervention efforts.

### **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.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: HOUSING

**Mortgage Insurance Fund (MIF):** The Executive proposal would allocate \$98 million in excess reserves from the MIF to provide \$12.8 million for the Neighborhood Preservation Program and \$5.4 million for the Rural Preservation Program, a decrease of \$4.8 million and \$2.2 million respectively from SFY 2024-25. The Executive proposal also includes \$23.5 million for the Rural Rental Assistance Program, an increase of \$275,000. The Executive also includes \$56.4 million for homeless housing programs administered by OTDA, an increase of \$2.8 million.

**City of Yes for Housing Opportunity Program:** The Executive provides \$1 billion to support the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity Program in New York City. This funding will support the development and preservation of affordable housing units, including preservation of Mitchell-Lama properties and other properties owned by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). In addition, the Executive proposes \$25 million for capital projects and improvements at housing developments owned or operated by NYCHA.

**Pro-Housing Community Development Projects:** The Executive provides \$100 million to assist pro-housing communities with critical infrastructure projects required for further housing development.

**Mixed-Income Revolving Loan Fund:** The Executive proposes \$50 million to provide low-cost second mortgages for development of mixed-income rental housing outside of New York City.

**Modular and Starter Homes:** The Executive proposes \$50 million to incentivize the building of modular and starter homes.

**Resilient and Ready Program:** The Executive budget includes \$50 million for emergency home repairs after natural disasters, an increase of \$10 million from SFY 2024-25.

**Farmworker Housing Program:** The Executive proposes \$5 million to expand affordable farmworker housing.

**PIT Housing Program Backfill:** The Executive proposes \$427 million to backfill appropriation authority that was used to provide temporary bond financing for projects within HFA's pipeline.

The Executive proposes eliminating \$150 million for the New York City Housing for the Future Program, \$140 million for NYCHA and \$80 million for Mitchell-Lama Preservation. The Executive eliminates \$212 million for various programs.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### HOUSING



My name is Dorca and I'm an organizer and board member with Met Council. I'm a lifelong New Yorker, fighting for my community, and my main focus is ensuring Black and brown and low income people don't have to experience the trauma of housing insecurity and homelessness.

I moved into my building in 1997. For 20 years, the building has had serious repairs issues, and the landlord's been warehousing units. Many of my neighbors who wanted to remain in the building have been harassed and illegally evicted. At the same time, we've seen major rent increases, like the 100% increase I received in 2014. I've managed, but in 2019, my grandmother, who raised me, passed. Between my grief, and the expenses related

to the funeral, I fell behind on rent.

When my landlord sued for eviction, I didn't qualify for a free attorney or a One-Shot deal, because of my income. Luckily, I was referred to a local activist who does pro bono representation. Not only did the attorney help me fight the eviction, but with his help, we could act on other issues in the building. Just the knowledge that I had an attorney caused my landlord to drop the nonpayment case. Meanwhile, the attorney helped my neighbors and I to sue affirmatively to address the building conditions. We have high levels of lead in the common area and when COVID started, the landlord started renovating, even demolishing over 40 units - we lived in mayhem, with things falling, walls cracking. For a long time, our front door and intercom were broken, and many units lacked fire alarms. This was an especially scary environment for families with young daughters, when someone was assaulted in the park across the street from the building.

If our politicians really want to protect us and address violence, they must fight to tip the balance of power in courts and keep people in their homes. I know firsthand how it is to feel cornered, to experience the mental and physical illness that come with the stress of facing housing insecurity and eviction. The stress is killer. We see the destruction of our communities and it hurts. People are so damaged by eviction, and they think it's their fault.

We need the tools to defend ourselves. A lawyer was so important to help us sort out all the issues in the building, identify the landlord's illegal behavior, and take collective action. There is so often a burden on us tenants and lay people to jump through hoops to prove income and document everything. It is a confusing and humiliating experience. And then the laws and judicial system always seem to side with landlords. We need the right to counsel to level things out and hold landlords accountable. We need RTC to protect buildings like mine, where we have been organizing and on rent strike since 2019. We need it to help us stay where we live, and ensure we live with safety and dignity." - **Dorca Reynoso, Organizer and Board Member, Met Council**

## **Affordable Housing Development and Preservation:**

### **Expanding Community-Controlled Affordable Housing**

To strengthen housing security, the Caucus is calling for a \$5 million expansion of the Community Controlled Affordable Housing Program. Initially funded at \$1 million in FY 2023-2024, this program empowers residents through Community Land Trusts, shared equity cooperatives, and other models of resident-controlled housing. By increasing the maximum award amounts per project, this initiative will further support communities in developing sustainable and affordable housing.

### **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act**

Advancing housing equity, the Caucus advocates for a \$200 million annual allocation over five years to fund the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act. This act enables tenants to purchase their buildings if they are placed for sale, preventing speculative real estate practices, building generational wealth, and ensuring stable housing options for families.

### **Jobs and Housing Program**

The Caucus champions the \$1 billion Jobs and Housing Program, structured to support:

- \$333 million for developing new affordable multifamily housing.
- \$333 million for affordable cooperative housing projects.
- \$333 million for rehabilitating existing cooperative housing.

Additionally, this initiative allocates \$25 million each for MWBE capacity-building grants and labor organization support, alongside \$10 million for administration, fostering a holistic approach to housing development.

### **Preserving Mitchell-Lama Properties**

Recognizing the importance of affordable housing for middle-class families, the Caucus proposes establishing a dedicated Mitchell-Lama Repair Fund. This initiative will address hazardous conditions and fund necessary renovations in these affordable rental and co-op properties, ensuring they meet local codes and remain a vital housing resource.

### **Supporting the NY Land Opportunity Program**

Building on its success, the Caucus supports \$2.5 million to expand the New York Land Opportunity Program. NYLOP assists Faith-Based and Mission-Driven Organizations in developing affordable housing, with plans to extend this initiative statewide, adding hundreds of affordable units to regions like NYC, Westchester, and Erie County.

### **Rehabilitating Rent-Stabilized Apartments**

To combat the housing shortage, the Caucus advocates for \$40 million in grants to repair vacant rent-stabilized apartments across NYC, Nassau, Westchester, and Rockland counties. These repairs will bring units back to market, providing safe and affordable housing options for families in need.





## **Tenant and Homeowner Protections:**

### **Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)**

Acknowledging the housing crisis, the Caucus supports funding the HAVP at \$250 million. This initiative offers rental assistance to low-income households, similar to Section 8, ensuring they pay no more than 30% of their income toward rent. With this funding, the state can protect families from eviction and reduce homelessness.

### **Combating Toxic Home Flipping**

Addressing predatory real estate practices, the Caucus supports the End Toxic Home Flipping Act, which imposes taxes on speculative property flips occurring within two years of purchase. This measure deters speculative flipping while promoting long-term housing stability for New Yorkers.

### **Ensuring Legal Representation for Tenants**

To reduce evictions, the Caucus calls for \$200 million to expand civil legal services under a statewide Right to Counsel program. This funding will help tenants and homeowners secure legal representation in eviction and foreclosure cases, safeguarding their housing stability.

### **Eviction Prevention Services (LSNYC)**

The Caucus calls for \$25 million to fund eviction-prevention programs, including \$10 million for Legal Services NYC. This initiative provides tenants with benefits counseling and legal representation, reducing homelessness and ensuring long-term housing stability.

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## **Public and Supportive Housing Investments:**

### **Communities First Initiative**

To combat displacement, the Caucus supports a \$50 million allocation to the Communities First Initiative. By providing counseling and foreclosure prevention services, this program has helped over 22,500 homeowners since its inception, ensuring neighborhood stability.

### **Investing in Public Housing**

To address the critical capital needs of public housing, the Caucus advocates for a \$5 billion investment over five years, starting with \$900 million in FY 2025-2026. In addition, an investment of \$2 billion in public housing outside of NYC. 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. This funding will preserve NYCHA units and public housing outside NYC, providing safe and affordable housing while boosting the state economy.

## **Enhancing Supportive Housing for Survivors**

The Caucus urges a \$150 million increase in funding for the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP) to support domestic violence survivors, primarily single mothers of color. This funding will ensure these individuals have access to stable, affordable housing with essential services.

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### **Housing Equity and Accessibility:**

#### **Improving Fair Housing Enforcement**

The Caucus seeks \$8 million to enhance the Fair Housing Testing Program. This funding will expand paired testing to prevent discrimination, increase penalties for violators, and deepen services across underserved areas, ensuring housing equity for all.

#### **Adjusting Shelter and Basic Needs Allowances**

To address deep poverty, the Caucus calls for adjusting the Public Assistance Shelter Allowance to match HUD's Fair Market Rents and increasing the Basic Needs Grant to reflect inflation. These changes will help low-income households afford essentials like housing, hygiene products, and transportation.

#### **Extending Housing Subsidies for Youth**

To support foster care youth aging out of the system, the Caucus proposes extending preventive services housing subsidies to age 24. This measure ensures young adults transitioning to independence have stable housing options.

#### **Housing Navigation and Supports: A Model for Rental Assistance**

The Caucus supports \$47.3 million to improve rental assistance utilization and housing placement statewide. This investment will connect families with housing, support landlords, and streamline agency processes to ensure vouchers are used effectively.

- **\$40 million** for Housing Navigators and Support Staff to assist families in finding and keeping housing, while building relationships with landlords.
- **\$7 million** to streamline processes, reduce delays, and pilot new tools for faster placements.
- **\$300,000** for training staff to navigate subsidy programs and share best practices.

Too many families lose vouchers due to long searches or discrimination. Programs like Emergency Housing Vouchers show that navigation and landlord support cut search times and improve success. This funding will keep families housed, reduce bureaucracy, and make New York a leader in fighting housing instability.

**Data and Technical Assistance:**

**Displacement Alert Project (DAP)**

The Caucus supports \$250,000 in continued funding for the Displacement Alert Project, which provides critical data tools for tenant organizers, legal services, and policymakers addressing housing crises.

**Supporting Neighborhood Preservation Companies**

The Caucus endorses continued funding for the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State, which provides training and technical assistance to 140 Neighborhood Preservation Companies. Expanding these services will further strengthen housing and community development efforts.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: CLIMATE ACTION, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND ENERGY

**Sustainable Future Program:** The Executive proposal includes \$1 billion over five years for climate mitigation and adaptation capital projects.

**Clean Water Infrastructure:** The Executive proposes \$500 million for water infrastructure programs, which is unchanged from SFY 2024-25.

**Environmental Protection Fund (EPF):** The Executive proposal includes \$400 million for the EPF, which is level funding from SFY 2024-25.

**State Superfund Program:** The Executive proposal includes \$125 million for the state's Superfund Program, an increase of \$25 million over SFY 2024-25, including support for the Environmental Restoration Program. This funding increase is accompanied by a proposal to amend the superfund program, increase its bond cap and extend it for 10 years.

**State Parks:** The Executive proposal includes New York Works capital funding of \$217.5 million for three grant programs, which includes \$50 million for the New York Statewide Investment in More Swimming (NY SWIMS) initiative, \$67.5 million to support municipal and non-profit community center projects through the New York Building Recreational Infrastructure for Communities, Kids and Seniors (NY BRICKS) program and \$100 million for the New York Places for Learning, Activity and Youth Socialization (NY PLAYS) program to build playgrounds.

**Hudson River Park Trust:** The Executive proposal includes \$85 million for the rehabilitation and development of Pier 76 in Manhattan.

**Dairy Farm Modernization Grant Program:** The Executive proposes \$10 million to provide grants for on-farm milk storage capacity and milk cooling and transfer systems, bringing total funding to \$34 million over two years.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

*"Agency & Action"*

### **CLIMATE ACTION, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND ENERGY**

"My name is Mone Choy. I am a member of WE ACT's Climate Justice Working Group. I am 68 years old and live in New York City in the neighborhood of Inwood. I live on a fixed income from disability payments and struggle monthly to pay my bills. My rent is frozen at \$1,928 but this is nearly my entire monthly disability check. I don't have room in my budget to run my air conditioner, even during these heat waves we have been experiencing in the summer. When I experience heat, my blood pressure shoots up and I get dizzy. I have air conditioners in my home that worried friends have gifted me, but I can't turn them on otherwise I won't be able to pay the energy bill at the end of the month. During the summer months, I consider myself a climate refuge. If it is going to be above 85 degrees, I leave my apartment at 4:30am - before it gets oppressively hot. I have to pack food, a change of clothes, water, medicine, and head over to a senior center where I spend my day before getting kicked out at 4pm, often at the height of the afternoon heat. Sometimes, the senior centers aren't open (like on the weekends) which leaves me in a bad place. It is exhausting and dispiriting traveling around like a nomad trying to stay safe in the heat because I can't afford my cooling bill. This isn't a luxury or convenience for me - it is life or death.



heat. Sometimes, the senior centers aren't open (like on the weekends) which leaves me in a bad place. It is exhausting and dispiriting traveling around like a nomad trying to stay safe in the heat because I can't afford my cooling bill. This isn't a luxury or convenience for me - it is life or death.

New York is known for its high cost of living - it is not an affordable place to live. And it feels like our elected leaders have given up trying to solve the problem. That is why I have gotten involved with the NY HEAT Act. It is the one tangible bill that the state can pass that will have a direct and felt benefit on my life. Addressing rising energy costs with a 6% income utility cap would be an invaluable change. It could quite literally save my life. NY HEAT also stops us from investing in the wrong thing. It is absolutely insane to me that we as a state continue to invest in gas infrastructure when our climate law and the climate itself is telling us that we need to stop. We needed to start transitioning to renewable energy years ago, but every day we continue to invest in fossil fuel pipelines at our own expense. It is not lost on me that the Con-Ed bill I can't afford is funding the expansion of fracked gas pipelines that are contributing to these heat waves that are causing me so much pain. The NY HEAT Act is common sense legislation and needs to happen now." - **Mone Choy, Member of WE ACT Climate Justice Working Group**

## **Climate Action and Just Transition Initiatives:**

### **Cap & Invest Support and Enhancements**

The Caucus strongly supports the implementation of a Cap-and-Invest program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fund climate initiatives. Enhancements include:

1. **Penalty Provisions:** Program must include penalties for businesses that exceed emissions or co-pollutant limits. The Caucus recommends establishing enforcement mechanisms by 2025 to hold violators accountable.
2. **Affordability Measures:** One-third (33%) of revenues should directly support low- and moderate-income households through rebates, transit passes, and retrofit vouchers, ensuring climate action does not disproportionately burden vulnerable communities.
3. **Labor Protections:** Strong labor and community benefits standards must ensure transparency, union job creation, and protections for workers transitioning from fossil fuel industries.
4. **Enhanced Community Protections:** Facility-specific caps and stricter timelines for emission reductions in disadvantaged and environmental justice communities are essential to mitigating inequities. This includes improved oversight mechanisms, given the documented shortcomings highlighted in the State Comptroller's Air Quality audit.

### **Spending Criteria for Climate Action Fund**

All projects and programs funded through the Climate Action Fund should meet specific spending criteria. The money should be on-budget and spent on projects that do all of the following: (1) reduce climate emissions, (2) reduce co-pollutants and thus increase public health benefits, and (3) meet the job standards and economic development requirements included in the CAF. Additionally, at least 35% of all investments must be spent in Disadvantaged Communities, as per the state's Climate Law.

### **Electric School Bus Infrastructure and Transportation Improvements**

Recognizing the need for sustainable school transportation, the Caucus supports a \$75 million investment through NYSERDA to accelerate the shift to electric school buses. These funds will assist districts with purchasing buses, installing charging equipment, and upgrading electrical infrastructure to enhance public health and reduce emissions.

Additionally, the Caucus advocates for \$80 million to support centralized procurement of zero-emission school buses, charging infrastructure, and operational tools. Complementing these investments, the Caucus proposes \$80 million in grants for job creation in bus manufacturing and maintenance to bolster economic growth while supporting the transition to cleaner transportation.

## **Enhancing School Infrastructure for Sustainability**

The Caucus is committed to ensuring schools are not left behind in the state’s climate action goals. To ensure that New York Schools are healthy and energy-efficient, the members are seeking to support:

- \$2 million for a Ventilation Unit within NYC's School Construction Authority to improve air quality, prioritizing Environmental Justice communities.
- \$80 million for the Green and Healthy Schools Fund to support electrification, mitigation, and ventilation upgrades in NYC public schools, ensuring energy efficiency and environmental safety.

## **Supporting Climate Education and Public Awareness**

To align public understanding with New York’s climate goals, the Caucus supports a \$12 million investment for statewide education campaigns about the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), highlighting the benefits and requirements of decarbonization.

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### ***Integrated Climate and Environmental Justice Initiatives:***

#### **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**

The Caucus is pushing for an additional \$500 million in LIHEAP funding, particularly for the Cooling Assistance Program to subsidize summer utility bills for low-income households. This funding will help the state meet its commitment to capping energy burdens at 6% for all households.

#### **Increasing the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)**

To achieve a funding target of \$500 million by 2025, the Caucus calls for increased allocations to the Environmental Justice line within the EPF. This will ensure frontline communities receive tangible environmental health benefits.



Lead Exposure, Water Infrastructure, and Emerging Contaminants:

**Addressing Lead Exposure and Poisoning**

The Caucus emphasizes the renewal of \$10 million in funding for lead abatement for landlords in Communities of Concern, restricted to those with financial need who engage in long-term lead elimination efforts. Additionally, the state must retain \$325 million allocated in SFY2023 for lead hazard testing and program administration. The Caucus also seeks an additional \$50 million for city and county health departments to expand the Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention Program.

**Clean Water Infrastructure Act Funding**

The Caucus is continuing its support for a \$5 billion, 5-year budget renewal for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA). Of this, \$1 billion should be dedicated to the Lead Service Line Replacement Program, ensuring municipalities can inventory and replace all lead service lines.

**Combating PFAS and Emerging Contaminants**

The Caucus supports a \$125 million program under the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to aid municipalities and water systems in testing and filtering PFAS and other emerging contaminants, protecting at-risk communities from harmful pollutants.

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Transitioning to a Just Energy Economy:

**A Just Energy Transition**

The Caucus supports the Just Energy Transition Act (JETA), which mandates phasing out 4 gigawatts of fossil fuel facilities by 2030 while prioritizing disadvantaged communities. JETA emphasizes replacing these facilities with renewable energy systems and energy storage, ensuring no job losses or harm to impacted communities.

**The Green Affordable Pre-Electrification (GAP) Fund**

This fund, central to the state's equity goals, provides "gap" funding for low- and moderate-income households to address electrification barriers, including green and healthy homes and weatherization. The Caucus calls for expanded funding to ensure this program meets statewide needs.

**NYS Children's Environmental Health Centers (NYSCHECK)**

The Caucus advocates for an increase in NYSCHECK funding from \$1 million to \$5 million. As a pioneer in pediatric environmental health, NYSCHECK supports families statewide in diagnosing and treating environmentally linked conditions.

## **Statewide Building Decarbonization Program**

A statewide program that will focus on building decarbonization for low and moderate income households to increase energy affordability for those who need it most. This includes upgrades such as free heat pumps, free insulation, renewable energy installations, and repairs including asbestos, mold and other hazard remediation.

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### *Forest and Ecosystem Protection, Environmental Justice Initiatives:*

#### **Protect Forests to Fight Climate Change**

The Caucus calls for \$13.5 million to expand the Forest Conservation Easement Land Trusts (FCELT) Grant Program, which helps accelerate forest conservation efforts critical to combating climate change.

#### **Expanded NYCHA and Housing Retrofits**

To improve public housing and reduce energy costs, the Caucus calls for:

- \$30 million for NYCHA system upgrades to prepare for electrification and decarbonization.
- \$25 million for pre-retrofit repairs for low-income homeowners, ensuring buildings are ready for efficiency upgrades.
- \$30 million via NYSERDA to fund retrofits in underserved areas, addressing critical housing inequities.

#### **Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems (SCALE)**

The Caucus supports a continued \$4 million allocation for the SCALE project to assess Adirondack lakes, guiding efforts to reduce asthma-causing pollutants and achieve climate justice. Consortium partners include leading scientists and water resource managers from universities, not-for-profits, and state and federal agencies.

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### *Workforce and Training Investments:*

#### **Supporting the Delivered Fuel Industry Transition**

To expand clean energy services, the Caucus calls for \$20 million to support delivered fuel companies in transitioning to offer energy efficiency and renewable energy services. Funds will cover outreach, public education, training, and equipment costs. Leveraging NYSERDA's existing relationships, this initiative ensures that trusted local providers play a key role in the state's energy transition.

## **Clean Energy Programs at Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow (NEST)**

The Caucus calls for \$1 million for workforce research on clean energy careers and \$4 million for interagency collaboration to address gaps in climate education and job readiness.

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### **Supporting Renewable Energy and Just Energy Transitions:**

#### **Build Public Renewables Act Implementation**

The Caucus strongly supports a \$100 million investment to implement the New York Power Authority's Renewables Strategic Plan and their mandate to phase out fossil fuel power plants by 2030, expanding public power infrastructure and renewable energy generation.

#### **Establishing the Hudson Valley Power Authority**

The Caucus supports the Hudson Valley Power Authority Act, which seeks to establish a power authority in the region to own and operate electricity services. This authority would create or acquire subsidiaries and energy observatory corporations, enabling effective community governance of power authorities. By prioritizing local oversight and renewable energy generation, this initiative addresses energy equity and climate justice.

#### **Community Directed Climate Solutions Grant Program**

The Caucus advocates for a \$258 million program for community-led energy and climate grants, including infrastructure planning and implementation measures. This program would provide grants directly to community-based organizations in disadvantaged communities to design and implement community-led pollution reduction projects. Right now, the State has no structured support for communities to develop community-led plans or projects. This program would change that, democratizing how projects are designed and funded. This program would complement other existing state and local programs and funding sources with the specific goal of helping to build community capacity and engagement to develop their own climate solutions and implementation strategies.

#### **Geothermal Heat Pump Tax Credit Expansion**

The Caucus calls for raising the geothermal heat pump tax credit cap to \$10,000 and making it refundable for low- and moderate-income households and those in disadvantaged communities.

## **Dedicate Funding for non-MTA Public Transit Agencies for Zero-Emission Buses**

The Caucus supports \$100 million for non-MTA public transit agencies to facilitate the transition to zero-emission buses. Given tight budget constraints, small planning teams, and the current higher cost of electric buses, many transit agencies across the state will need additional funding to purchase new buses and infrastructure and establish plans to transition their fleets. To address this concern, the Caucus calls for \$100 million a year to support non-MTA transit agencies' transition to zero-emission buses. This would be an expansion of the \$100 million five-year program that ended with the Fiscal Year 2024 budget and aid local transit agencies in transitioning to electric buses.

## **Taxi Electrification Transition**

The Caucus supports \$80 million for grants and debt relief to assist taxi drivers in transitioning to zero-emission vehicles and to support the rapid development of wheelchair accessible electric vehicles, reducing emissions while supporting their livelihoods and increasing accessibility.

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## **Research and Pilot Programs for Green Innovation:**

### **Planning and Piloting Climate Farming Solutions**

The Caucus advocates for a \$17 million grant program for climate resilience planning and a \$60 million pilot program integrating renewable energy with sustainable farming practices.

### **Community Thermal Energy Network Pilots**

Investing \$40 million, the Caucus supports expanding NYSERDA's Community Heat Pump Pilot Program to enhance thermal energy networks.

### **Industrial Emissions Transition Plans**

The Caucus supports \$20 million to develop decarbonization plans for major emitters and an additional \$20 million for pilot programs targeting zero-emission industrial processes.

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## **Advancing Rural Climate and Clean Energy Solutions:**

### **Advancing Rural Climate Solutions**

The Caucus supports a \$17 million grant program for rural climate farming initiatives, enabling education and planning for climate resilience and emissions mitigation. A complementary \$60 million program will fund renewable energy projects co-located with sustainable farming practices, prioritizing BIPOC and beginning farmers.

## **Expanding Clean Energy Rebates**

The Caucus urges funding increases for rebate programs to advance energy efficiency:

- New Efficiency New York: \$70 million for rebates on energy efficiency improvements in buildings.
- Comfort Home: \$30 million for weatherization and electrification incentives for single-family homes.
- Clean Heat: \$100 million to promote heat pump installations across various building types.
- Lithium-Ion Batteries for Mobility Devices: A NYSERDA program to provide rebates for mobility device batteries, supporting delivery workers and individuals with disabilities.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: HEALTH

**Medicaid Global Cap:** The Executive proposes \$24.8 billion for the Global Cap Medicaid spending, an increase of \$1.6 billion or 6.7 percent over State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023-24. The Executive proposal reflects the revised Medicaid Global Cap metric enacted in the SFY 2022-23 budget which indexes spending growth to the five-year rolling average of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) spending annual growth rate.

**1115 Waiver:** The Executive proposal includes \$7.5 billion in funding over the next three years through an amendment to New York's Medicaid Section 1115 Demonstration Program to support a series of actions to advance health equity, reduce health disparities, and improve access to primary and behavioral health care across the state.

**Medicaid Enrollment:** The Executive projects Medicaid enrollment to decrease from 7.6 million to 6.8 million enrollees by March 2025, due to eligibility redeterminations following the unwinding of COVID-19 public health emergency declarations.

**Safety Net Hospital Transformation Program:** The Executive proposes to utilize up to \$500 million in existing funding from Statewide IV and V to support transformation plans submitted by safety net hospitals that focus on system sustainability.

**Unallocated Savings Targets:** The Executive proposes to save \$400 million by convening industry stakeholders to identify ways to achieve \$200 million in savings in both long-term care and mainstream Medicaid sectors.

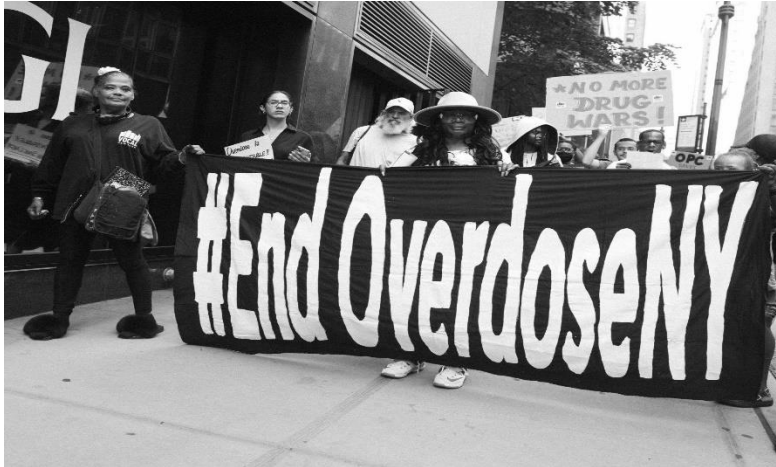
**Health Plan Surplus:** The Executive proposes to save \$204 million by eliminating the 1.0 percent premium increase originally implemented to aid plans with the administration of the Medicaid pharmacy benefit.

**Managed Long Term Care:** The Executive proposes to discontinue wage parity for the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP) resulting in \$200 million in savings in SFY 2024-25, growing to \$401 million in SFY 2025-26.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### **HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE**



The War on Drugs has always been a war on people — I know because I am one of its survivors. Shortly after President Nixon declared the drug war, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller accelerated harm and death throughout New York. Like so many people who use drugs, I was criminalized by policies before I was ever given the opportunity to seek help for myself and the trauma I've endured.

Back in 1995, I was arrested and incarcerated for selling drugs, and was given two to four years in prison, even though I pleaded with the courts to be

placed in treatment as an active user. Despite my own attempts to vocalize my need for more support and social services, I was denied that request. At the time of my arrest, methadone and buprenorphine (the gold standard of treatment for opioid use disorder) were not available in prison. I suffered through painful withdrawal, pulling out my hair and sleeping under my cot just to feel a bit more secure. I wish I could say my sentence was over when I came home in 1997, but my struggle only magnified as I navigated life after incarceration. I couldn't find a job, I couldn't find a decent place to live, and I was stigmatized as a felon. I was tossed to the side at every point where I needed help. Being incarcerated destroyed my life at a moment where I needed help the most. That's the mark the drug war left on my life, and for the thousands more, my story is all too familiar. Since 2020, over 20,000 New Yorkers have died from a preventable overdose. Deaths are likely undercounted because of significant lags and underfunding and staffing in medical examiners offices. Although Governor Hochul is touting a small decrease in overdose deaths, marginalized communities -- low-income, older New Yorkers and Black and Brown communities -- continue to have disproportionately higher rates of overdose. And, overdose remains the leading cause of death for homeless New Yorkers, but no corner of the state or community has been spared to this crisis.

Imagine that instead of incarcerating thousands of New Yorkers every year for drug-related offenses, our state invested in an infrastructure of care, harm reduction, housing, and evidence-based public health solutions — like harm reduction — that would save the lives of thousands more. That's why this year we are fighting for Senator Fernandez and Assemblymember Gonzalez- Rojas' Opioid Stewardship Fund Bill. This bill would make the Opioid Stewardship Fund a permanent revenue stream — that cannot be supplanted — with a percentage dedicated to recovery services and supports, and to the Department of Health to fund the harm reduction infrastructure; syringe service programs, drug user health hubs, and drug checking services. With 19 New Yorkers dying everyday - we need a sustainable funding stream to save lives. We are looking for leadership at this moment, and this coming session is a prime opportunity for the legislature to reverse the rising rates of Black and Brown New Yorkers dying from preventable overdose deaths.

- Marilyn Reyes, co-director of the Peer Network of New York, and board member at VOCAL-NY.



## **Comprehensive Health Equity and Access:**

### **New York Health Act**

The Caucus supports the passage of the New York Health Act, which seeks to establish a single-payer healthcare system for all New Yorkers. This transformative legislation would guarantee comprehensive healthcare coverage, eliminating disparities in access based on age, income, employment, or documentation status. It represents a vital step toward equity and universality in the healthcare system.

### **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 extending health benefits to New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status.

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## **Strengthening Public Health Protections:**

### **Medical Debt Reform**

Hospitals in New York State receive over \$1 billion annually from the Indigent Care Pool (ICP) to provide financial assistance to low- and moderate-income patients. However, reports reveal that some hospitals use aggressive debt collection tactics, disproportionately targeting low-income and minority communities. The Caucus advocates requiring hospitals to adopt a uniform financial assistance policy and application as a condition for ICP funding. Expanding financial assistance eligibility and protections would address inequities in medical debt practices and ensure fair treatment for all patients.

### **Removing the Medicaid Global Cap**

Implemented in 2011, the Medicaid Global Cap restricts spending growth based on outdated health inflation metrics, hindering the program's ability to meet evolving healthcare needs. While revisions in the SFY 2022-23 budget increased transparency, the fundamental cap policy remains. The Caucus supports removing the Medicaid Global Cap entirely to ensure Medicaid funding aligns with the healthcare needs of New Yorkers.

## **Fully Fund the Medicaid Managed Care Quality Incentive Program**

The Caucus advocates for the full funding of the Medicaid Managed Care Quality Incentive Program, requiring an investment of \$300 million, including an additional \$252 million in state funds. This program has been pivotal in enhancing Medicaid care quality by rewarding plans that address health disparities and deliver services to over six million New Yorkers. It is essential to guarantee sustainable funding and safeguard the health outcomes of underserved populations. Consistent program underfunding risks eroding these achievements, leaving vulnerable communities at greater risk.

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### **Indigent Care and Safety Net Hospitals:**

#### **Targeted Funding Redistribution**

Safety net hospitals are the backbone of healthcare for uninsured, underinsured, and Medicaid-dependent populations. However, the current funding system fails to adequately support these institutions. The Caucus calls for redistributing ICP funding to better target qualified safety net hospitals. Additionally, enhanced Medicaid reimbursement and prioritizing safety net hospitals for Statewide Healthcare Facility Transformation Funds would provide them with the capital needed to continue serving marginalized communities.

#### **Investing in SUNY Downstate**

SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University is an indispensable healthcare provider and educational hub, addressing the needs of underserved populations in Brooklyn and beyond. The Caucus emphasizes the necessity for substantial state investment in SUNY Downstate, particularly to address its significant capital needs. As recommendations emerge from the Community Advisory Board for Modernization and Revitalization, created in the FY 2024-25 budget, the state must prioritize long-term funding to ensure SUNY Downstate continues to serve its critical role.

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### **Enhancing Maternal and Infant Health:**

#### **Monetary Maternity Support**

The Caucus is advocating 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 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.

## **Health at Home Program**

In support of infant and maternal health, the Caucus calls for the inclusion of \$800,000 in the FY 2025-26 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.

## **Early Intervention Support**

The Early Intervention (EI) Program, serving 70,000 infants and toddlers with developmental delays, has endured stagnant reimbursement rates for over two decades. These outdated rates, which are even lower than those in 2009, have driven over 2,500 therapists to leave the field and caused the closure of numerous service agencies since 2019. To stabilize the program and ensure children with developmental delays have continued access to critical services, the Caucus calls for New York State to immediately implement the 5% rate increase for in-person EI services announced by the Governor in last year's budget

## **Expanding Medicaid Coverage for Blood Pressure Monitoring**

The Caucus calls for expanding Medicaid coverage to include validated self-measured blood pressure devices, additional cuffs, and clinical services for pregnant and postpartum individuals. These enhancements, estimated at \$5 million annually, will reduce maternal mortality and improve health outcomes for new mothers.

## **Including MILC Allowance in the State Budget**

The Caucus supports the inclusion of the Mothers and Infants Lasting Change (MILC) allowance to provide income support during the last three months of pregnancy and the first 18 months of a child's life. This will cost the state an estimated \$10 million annually.

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### **Healthcare Worker Shortage:**

#### **Addressing Homecare Workforce Shortages**

The Caucus supports an increase of \$10 million in annual investment through the New York State Workforce Innovation Center to professionalize and expand the homecare workforce, ensuring quality care for the aging population. This would bring total funding levels to \$30 million.

#### **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.

#### **Expanding Loan Forgiveness to Address Healthcare Workforce Shortages**

The Caucus supports the expansion of New York State's loan forgiveness programs for healthcare workers to tackle critical workforce shortages and enhance care access in underserved areas. Current programs, such as the Nurses Across New York (NANY) Loan Repayment Program and the Community Mental Health Loan Repayment Program, have achieved success in targeted professions but lack comprehensive coverage. The Caucus proposes extending eligibility to primary care physicians, dentists, allied health professionals, and other essential healthcare workers, offering loan repayment assistance of up to \$50,000 for a two-year service commitment in high-need areas. This broadened initiative would address existing gaps, strengthen recruitment and retention, and provide support for a wider range of critical healthcare roles.

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### **Strengthening Primary and Preventive Care:**

#### **Investing in the Primary Care Investment Act**

The Caucus supports the Primary Care Investment Act, which aims to enhance the role of primary care in New York's healthcare system. This legislation mandates reporting on healthcare expenditures to determine the proportion allocated to primary care services by insurance companies and Medicaid. It sets a goal for at least 12.5% of total healthcare spending to be directed toward primary care. Insurance plans and Medicaid providers not meeting this target would be required to develop plans to increase their primary care spending by 1% annually until the goal is achieved.

### **Establishing FQHC Payment Parity**

The Caucus calls for equitable compensation for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) providing behavioral health services via telehealth, aligning payment models with other providers. Estimated cost: \$10 million annually.

### **Elimination of Partially Capitated Long Term Care Plans**

Regarding the elimination of partially capitated long-term care plans, the Caucus supports transitioning Medicaid enrollees back to a fee-for-service model, similar to the system prior to the shift to managed care over a decade ago. This proposal would maintain fully capitated programs serving primarily dual-eligible populations. Partially capitated plans currently do not provide the full range of healthcare services that Medicaid beneficiaries are entitled to, often resulting in additional services being delivered through either a fee-for-service model or Medicare. This transition aims to address issues such as providers not receiving adequate financial support from insurance plans for legally required wage increases for home care workers. By focusing on home and personal care services, which represent the largest category of spending under Managed Long-Term Care, this proposal seeks to allow the state to reinvest potential savings into the Medicaid program to support reimbursement rates that more accurately reflect the cost of care being delivered.

### **Telehealth Services Expansion**

The Caucus strongly supports initiatives to improve and expand access to telehealth services across New York State. These services offered convenience, reduced wait times, and allowed patients to connect with providers beyond their immediate geographic areas—an essential factor in addressing workforce shortages in healthcare and behavioral health fields.

Despite significant advancements, additional steps are needed to fully integrate telehealth into New York's healthcare landscape. The Caucus advocates for the permanent adoption of parity provisions that ensure telehealth services are reimbursed at the same rate as in-person visits. Furthermore, smaller providers serving vulnerable populations should also receive reimbursement parity when both the provider and patient engage remotely, strengthening financial support for these critical services. These measures will foster equitable access to healthcare and behavioral health resources for all New Yorkers, regardless of location or circumstance.

## **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.

### **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.

### **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, colonoscopy, and diagnostic testing if abnormal results are found. The Caucus supports \$26 million in funding to help restore funding.

### **Combating Illegal Flavored Vape Products**

The Caucus supports strengthening enforcement against illegal flavored vape products in the FY26 Executive Budget. Members propose empowering the Department of Taxation and Finance to regulate distributors through licensing, excise tax collection, and expanded authority to inspect, seize, and penalize violators. Additionally, defining and banning nicotine analogues will close legal loopholes and address emerging threats to public health. These measures will protect youth, support responsible retailers, and ensure stronger oversight of harmful products infiltrating our communities.

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**Addressing the Opioid Crisis and Substance Use:**

**Supporting Overdose Prevention Centers**

Statewide, Black New Yorkers face the highest rates of preventable overdose deaths, even as rates among white New Yorkers stabilize. Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) in New York City have emerged as critical, evidence-based wellness hubs addressing this crisis in historically disinvested neighborhoods. These centers provide lifesaving interventions, connect individuals to comprehensive wraparound services—including housing, healthcare, and drug treatment—and foster healing in communities disproportionately affected by substance use.

In three years, OPCs have intervened in over 1,700 overdoses, prevented countless fatalities, and diverted over 100,000 instances of public drug use and five million units of drug litter from parks and streets. The Caucus supports executive action or legislation to ensure state-level protection for these nationally recognized centers, complementing existing local approval, and reinforcing New York's leadership in harm reduction strategies. Allocating additional funding and resources will strengthen their capacity to save lives and improve public health outcomes statewide.

**Opioid Stewardship Fund**

Currently, New York State is in an addiction public health emergency due to overdose deaths across the state. To help combat this issue, the Caucus calls for legislation that would ensure at least ten percent of funds from the opioid stewardship fund shall be invested in recovery services and requires an annual report to the legislature regarding funds distributed from the opioid stewardship fund. Additionally, this would make the opioid stewardship fund permanent.

**Legalizing Drug Checking Services**

The Caucus also advocates for legislation to extend legal immunity to individuals and organizations participating in drug checking services. This proactive approach empowers individuals to identify harmful substances, such as fentanyl and other adulterants, reducing the likelihood of accidental overdoses. Drug checking programs are an essential tool in combating the overdose crisis, particularly in communities facing high rates of substance use. The estimated annual cost of this initiative is \$2 million, a modest investment that can save lives, foster safer practices, and connect individuals to harm reduction and treatment services.

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**Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure:**

**Sustaining Community Health Advocates**

The Caucus supports \$6.5 million in funding for CHA, which provides essential assistance to New Yorkers navigating insurance and resolving billing disputes. This investment will stabilize CHA's ability to meet growing consumer needs and expand outreach efforts.



### **Expanding Navigator Funding**

The Navigator program is essential for helping uninsured New Yorkers access coverage. The Caucus supports \$38 million to maintain high-quality enrollment services and \$5 million for community-based outreach in underserved areas.

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### **Rural Health Network Development Program**

Restoring funding to \$16.2 million would expand access to healthcare in underserved rural areas, ensuring that these communities receive equitable care.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: MENTAL HYGIENE

**Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA):** The Executive proposes a 1.5 percent COLA to increase wages for voluntary mental hygiene service providers. For the mental hygiene agencies, the state share of the COLA is comprised of a total investment of \$120.4 million with \$74.2 million allocated to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), \$37.0 million allocated to the Office of Mental Health (OMH), and \$9.3 million allocated to the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).

**Minimum Wage:** The Executive proposal would include an additional \$57 million for minimum wage increases for staff at voluntary not-for-profits licensed under OPWDD, OMH, and OASAS.

**Expand Inpatient Bed Capacity:** The Executive proposal includes \$22 million in funding to open 125 additional state-operated inpatient psychiatric beds, including 15 for children and adolescents, 85 for adults, and 25 forensic.

**Transition to Home Units (THU):** The Executive proposal includes \$37 million in funding to support 75 THU beds in one state-operated and two community-based facilities.

**Opioid Settlement Fund:** The Executive proposal appropriates \$63.7 million from the Opioid Settlement Fund. Funding would be utilized to continue investments in various initiatives that address the opioid crisis, based on the recommendations provided by the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024-25.

**Increase Support for Existing Residential Programs:** The Executive includes \$43 million to increase stipends for over 17,000 housing units supported under the program.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE

#### Mental Hygiene

#### **Supporting Investments in the Children's Behavioral Health System**

The Caucus strongly supports a \$195 million investment in New York's children's behavioral health outpatient system. This funding will address critical workforce shortages and rate inadequacies in Outpatient Clinics (Article 31 and 32s), Child and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS), and Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). This investment will ensure rates reflect inflation and the complexities of serving children and families, while also increasing compensation for providers coordinating care. With these reforms, over 1,300 additional clinicians can be hired, and services expanded to reach more than 26,000 children statewide. The Caucus is committed to ensuring timely access to behavioral health services, reducing waitlists, and strengthening the mental health system for New York's youth.

#### **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. New Yorkers of color, who have mental health diagnoses, face extreme coercion and limited treatment options from the State. 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.

#### **Creating a Mental Health Corps for Youth**

To combat absenteeism and mental health challenges among youth, the Caucus supports funding of \$5 million annually for the establishment of a Mental Health Corps, a network of trained individuals offering emergency assistance, mentoring, and long-term support.

## **Youth Mental Health**

Recent events like the pandemic have highlighted that 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.
- Youth Mental Health Advisory Board - Amongst the shortage of behavioral and mental specialists, lack of representation within marginalized communities, and insufficient funding infrastructure and opportunities for appropriate school-based services, the legislature hereby finds the importance in establishing a dedicated council to support youth in their mental and behavioral needs by increasing youth participation in state government
- Youth Mental Health Loan Forgiveness - Student loan forgiveness awards for the purpose of increasing the number of youth mental health professionals employed in underserved schools across New York State.

## **Expanding Mental Health Caregiver Support and Psychoeducation**

The Caucus advocates for \$250,000 to expand NAMI-NYC's psychoeducation programs, including support groups, family mentoring, and helplines. These initiatives empower families and caregivers to better support loved ones with mental health challenges. The funding will also support NAMI-NYC's new youth peer support and suicide prevention program, addressing the mental health crisis among young New Yorkers.

## **Establishing an LGBTQ+ Article 31 Mental Health Clinic**

Recognizing the disproportionate mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, the Caucus supports \$1 million for the launch of an LGBTQ+ Article 31 Mental Health Clinic. This clinic will provide culturally affirming services, including therapy, psychiatry, and medication management, ensuring equitable access to mental health care for marginalized communities.

## **Mental Health Support in Correctional Settings**

The caucus proposes \$24 million in the FY 2026 New York State budget to support individuals with mental health issues in the criminal justice system. This funding would expand diversion programs such as mental health courts, enhance in-facility evidence-based treatment, and strengthen reentry services by connecting individuals to housing, employment, and ongoing mental health care. It would also establish regional mental health teams for targeted intervention and provide specialized training for law enforcement, corrections, and court personnel to address mental health crises effectively. This investment prioritizes care over punishment, aiming to reduce incarceration rates, improve public safety, and create a more equitable justice system.

Additionally, the Caucus proposes \$6 million to launch *Corrections Care*, a mental health initiative for New York State's 20,000 correctional officers. The program would include annual mental health screenings, confidential access to therapy, peer mentoring, crisis intervention teams, resilience training, and dedicated mental health leave. By addressing the unique stressors of correctional work, this funding would improve officer well-being, retention, and workplace safety, ensuring a healthier and more effective workforce.

## **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. The integration is crucial to address the complex interplay between mental health and addiction.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION



“Foundation Aid is one of the few funding formulas that ensures more resources go to high-need school districts rather than going to more affluent ones. It has been a lifeline for districts serving the vast majority of Black and Brown students and students in poverty, but its impact goes far beyond that. Foundation Aid has also supported rural and other historically underfunded communities, showing us that equitable school funding is not a partisan issue. Any update to the formula must preserve this equity. If education is truly the great equalizer, then Foundation Aid must remain a priority.” - **Marina Marcou-O'Malley, Co-Executive Director at the Alliance for Quality Education**

## **K-12 Education Investments:**

### **Foundation Aid Funding**

The Caucus supports a significant update to the Foundation Aid formula to reflect the actual cost of providing every student with a sound, basic education. This includes adding weights for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and those who are homeless or in foster care. Additionally, \$2 billion in additional state aid is needed to including updating Census poverty rates, updating the Regional Cost Index, replacing free/reduced price meal counts with economically disadvantaged counts, eliminating the artificial floor on the income wealth index, enhance reimbursement for BOCES aid to expand access to Career and Technical Education (CTE), enhanced special services aids for non-component BOCES, a new round of Universal Prekindergarten grants, and support for students with disabilities through age 22.

### **Expand Student Access to Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

To prepare students for successful careers, the Caucus calls for \$53.8 million to raise the salary limit for BOCES aid and \$49.2 million to support CTE programs in districts that do not participate in BOCES, Big Five City school district. These investments will expand opportunities for students in career, technical, occupational, and business education, ensuring a well-prepared workforce for New York's economy.

The Caucus also endorses a similar approach to enhance Special Services aids, extending support to students in career, technical, occupational, and business education programs.

### **Supporting the Blue-Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures**

The Caucus backs a \$2.3 million allocation for the State Education Department to begin implementing Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. This initiative ensures that all students have access to multiple pathways to academic and career success.

### **Enrollment Growth Support**

The Caucus advocates for the development of a "Growth Aid" formula to assist school districts experiencing significant enrollment surges or increases in specialized student populations, including English Language Learners. By allocating funds to accommodate these changes, districts will be better equipped to meet the immediate and evolving needs of all school-age children.

### **Creating Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Resources**

To promote equity in education, the Caucus supports \$250,000 to develop inclusive teaching resources and curricula. These materials will address racial and cultural inclusivity across K-12 classrooms, supporting diversity and representation in education.

### **Increasing Teacher Diversity**

Recognizing the disparity between New York's diverse student body and its teaching workforce, the Caucus advocates for an \$8 million investment to enhance teacher diversity through recruitment, training, and retention programs.



### **Bilingual Education Aid**

Recognizing the growing need for bilingual instruction, the Caucus supports a \$1 million increase in funding to expand resources for English Language Learners and to certify more bilingual educators. This investment will ensure that New York’s diverse student population receives equitable access to quality education, addressing language barriers and fostering academic success.

### **Appropriately Resourcing State Aid Oversight & Monitoring**

To manage nearly \$30 billion in annual state aid to districts, the Caucus supports a \$1.85 million investment to expand staffing in the Office of Education Finance. This funding will improve the efficiency and accuracy of aid distribution.

### **Ensuring Universal FAFSA Access**

The Caucus advocates for a \$5 million investment to implement Universal FAFSA access across New York State. This initiative will remove barriers to financial aid for students, including undocumented students, by providing the resources and support necessary to complete applications for FAFSA and state aid programs such as TAP and the DREAM Act. By ensuring equitable access to financial assistance, the Caucus is prioritizing higher education opportunities for all.

### **Increasing Early Literacy Accessibility**

Recognizing the literacy crisis in New York State and the disproportionate number of Black and Brown youth who fail to reach grade-level reading, the caucus supports a \$3 million investment to support the implementation of the Reach Out and Read Program in 95 pediatric health sites across New York State. Reach Out and Read is a research-driven literacy intervention that provides children with books during pediatric checkups, while also providing guidance for guardians on how to read more with their children to increase the habit of reading. Studies have shown this program has resulted in increased literacy development, kindergarten readiness, and higher language scores in children from low-income and urban families, which will help to close the literacy achievement gap between Black and Brown youth and their peers.

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### **Early Childhood Education**

#### **Expanding Pre-K Access**

The Caucus calls for \$150 million to expand full-day Pre-K across New York State, particularly in underserved communities such as Long Island. Early childhood education is critical to addressing learning gaps and ensuring long-term success. Additionally, the Caucus is advocating for \$3 million to address early literacy.

## **Enhancing Oversight of Pre-K Programs**

To support the administration of \$970 million in Pre-K funding, the Caucus recommends a \$1.9 million allocation for the Office of Early Learning to address staffing needs and improve program quality assurance.

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### **Expanded Learning and Afterschool Programs:**

#### **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 \$500,000 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.

#### **Establishing an Office of Expanded Learning**

The Caucus advocates for \$5 million to create a centralized office to oversee and align afterschool programs statewide, ensuring consistency and quality across all initiatives.

#### **Universal Afterschool Pilot Program**

The Caucus supports a \$20 million initial investment to establish a Universal Afterschool Pilot Program in New York City's five most underfunded community districts: Brooklyn CD 16, Bronx CD 5, Manhattan CD 11, Queens CD 4, and Staten Island CD 1. This program aims to provide critical after-school services, alleviating childcare responsibilities for working families, engaging children during peak hours of youth violence, and ensuring food security through the provision of dinner. By offering additional learning and recreational opportunities, the initiative fosters long-term academic and social benefits for students while aligning with the state's commitment to equity in education funding.

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**Student Health and Wellness:**

**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 ensure that these school meals are universally funded across New York.

**School Mental Health Professionals**

The Caucus calls for increased funding to ensure every school has licensed social workers and psychologists. A \$25 million investment is recommended to address mental health challenges and provide essential support to students.

**Prioritizing Cardiac Emergency Response Plans**

The Caucus strongly backs a \$2 million investment to implement Cardiac Emergency Response Plans in schools. This funding will equip schools with the training, resources, and protocols needed to prevent cardiac emergencies and save lives. By ensuring preparedness, the Caucus is advancing health and safety measures critical to the well-being of students and staff.

**988 Mental Crisis Line on Student IDs**

To address the growing issue of suicide among college students, the Caucus supports including mental health resource contact information on all student IDs. This low-cost measure raises awareness and ensures quick access to critical support.

**Expanding CUNY CARES for Disadvantaged Students**

The Caucus advocates for a \$10 million expansion of the CUNY CARES initiative to enhance holistic services for disadvantaged students. These funds will provide financial support, counseling, and essential resources, addressing barriers that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. The Caucus remains committed to empowering students through comprehensive, equitable support systems.

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**Equity and Inclusion in Education:**

**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.

**Supporting 4201 Schools**

To close the direct care wage gap, the Caucus continues to advocate for a \$30 million investment over three years for 4201 schools, which serve students with disabilities.

**Free and Appropriate Education for Students with Disabilities**

The Caucus supports \$65.4 million to provide Free and Appropriate Education to students with disabilities until age 22, as required by federal court rulings. This includes \$20.6 million in foundation aid to align with the Second Circuit Court of Appeals’ decision, ensuring students with disabilities receive the education and services they need to succeed.

**Enhanced Supports for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities**

To improve success rates for students with disabilities in higher education, the Caucus calls for \$2 million in enhanced support services, which will provide critical resources to ensure equitable opportunities in postsecondary education.

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**Arts, Historical and Cultural Education:**

**The Timbuctoo Pipeline – A Summer Climate and Careers Institute**

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.

**An Exhibit on the African American Experience in the Adirondacks**

The Caucus supports \$3 million to establish a permanent exhibit on the African American experience in the Adirondacks, fostering inclusivity and educating residents and visitors on this overlooked history.

## **Arts Education and Programming**

The Caucus supports \$300,000 to identify gaps in arts education statewide and \$2 million to expand residential programming and scholarships for the New York State Summer School for the Arts. These funds will ensure arts education remains accessible and impactful, fostering creativity and cultural appreciation among students

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### **Enhancing Justice System Education:**

#### **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.

#### **Expanding School Gardens and Green Learning Spaces**

The Caucus supports \$2 million to fund school gardens and green spaces, particularly in underserved communities. These initiatives improve academic outcomes, promote healthy eating habits, and provide trauma-informed learning environments.

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### **Supporting Teachers:**

#### **Professional Development for Educators**

The Caucus supports funding for statewide professional development to promote alternatives to suspensions and foster restorative practices in schools. An allocation of \$2 million is proposed to sustain programs like the Positive Learning Collaborative (PLC), which has reduced suspensions by 46% and improved school climate.

#### **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.

### **Sustaining Teach.org**

The Caucus advocates for a \$1.2 million allocation to sustain Teach.org, a platform dedicated to promoting teaching as a profession and addressing teacher shortages across New York State. This investment will ensure ongoing support for recruitment and development of highly qualified educators

### **Professional Development for Educators in Support of Solutions Not Suspensions**

The Caucus supports a \$5 million allocation to provide professional development funding for educators statewide to implement strategies aligned with Solutions Not Suspensions. This initiative focuses on training educators in restorative practices, culturally responsive teaching, and non-punitive disciplinary approaches, fostering safer and more supportive school environments while reducing reliance on suspensions.

### **Supporting Underrepresented Educators**

The Caucus champions the allocation of \$351,500 to fund statewide and regional conventions for underrepresented educators. These events will provide opportunities for professional development, networking, and discussions to address barriers faced by educators of color. This funding underscores the Caucus's dedication to diversifying New York's teaching workforce and promoting inclusive practices in education.

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### **Supporting Capital Needs and Community Schools:**

#### **United Community Schools**

The Caucus recommends \$4 million to sustain the current network of community schools and an additional \$100 million in categorical aid for statewide expansion, including \$5 million for United Community Schools to provide technical assistance.

#### **Strengthening the NYS Community Schools Network**

The Caucus supports a transformative \$1.2 billion investment in establishing a permanent childcare workforce compensation fund, ensuring fair wages for childcare and afterschool professionals across New York State. Recognizing the vital role these workers play in supporting students and families, this initiative will address longstanding inequities in compensation and workforce retention.

Additionally, the Caucus calls for \$5 million to bolster state and local networks advancing the community schools strategy, which integrates educational, health, and social services to create a holistic support system for students and families. To further enhance this effort, the Caucus endorses funding for a pilot program to explore a university-assisted community schools' model, leveraging higher education partnerships to strengthen community engagement and educational outcomes

### **Increasing State Aid for Library Construction**

Libraries are community institutions that provide wrap-around services that go beyond their mission statements. The State 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 \$50 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, members support the \$192 million in funding.

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### **Ending Educational Inequities in East Ramapo**

The Caucus advocates for comprehensive reforms in the East Ramapo Central School District to address systemic racism and chronic underfunding. With a graduation rate 23 points below the state average and one in eight students experiencing homelessness, the district's public schools are in crisis. The Caucus calls for immediate state support in the FY 2025-26 budget to fulfill the constitutional obligation of providing a sound basic education to all students in East Ramapo.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### **EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **Higher Education**

##### **Higher Education in Prison Program**

The Caucus supports dedicating \$40 million in the FY 2026 budget to expand higher education opportunities for incarcerated individuals across New York State. This funding would strengthen partnerships between correctional facilities and educational institutions, offering degree programs, vocational training, and reentry preparation. By investing in educational equity, New York can reduce recidivism, promote workforce readiness, and empower incarcerated individuals to reintegrate successfully into society, creating a more just and equitable future for all.

##### **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 \$18 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).

##### **Enhancing Supports and Services for Postsecondary Success of Students with Disabilities**

The Caucus supports funding a \$13.09 million grant program to support the reasonable accommodation needs and services for individuals with disabilities enrolled at degree granting institutions of higher education.

### **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.

### **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 2025-2026 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**

To improve New York's health outcomes and increase health equity, it is imperative that our physician workforce reflect the state's diverse population. The Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY) has been overseeing programs to provide opportunities and support to future doctors for more than three decades. The AMSNY Diversity in Medicine program funds 18 educational and mentorship programs, including five post-baccalaureate/master's programs. These programs are for students with potential who have faced adversity on their paths to medical school and who will work to improve access and health outcomes across New York. The Caucus support \$4 million in funding to sustain the program and improve New York health.

### **Diversity in Medicine Scholarship Programs**

Creating a diverse physician workforce can only be accomplished by expanding opportunities for a diverse array of medical school candidates. The AMSNY Diversity in Medicine Scholarship is necessary to provide these opportunities for students who may not otherwise be able to attend medical school. With 163 scholarships awarded since the program's inception, the scholarship helps medical students who have demonstrated resilience in overcoming adversity by eliminating the financial barrier to medical school enrolment. The Caucus supports \$1.25 million in funding to maintain these scholarship opportunities for a diverse population of medical school candidates and future New York physicians.

### **Advancing Loan Forgiveness for Public Service Attorneys**

The Caucus supports a significant increase in the student loan forgiveness award for public defenders, district attorneys, and indigent legal service attorneys, raising it above the current \$8,000 per year. Rising law school tuition and mounting debt burdens have deterred talented professionals from pursuing or remaining in these critical roles, leading to high attrition rates and reduced access to experienced representation for low-income New Yorkers. By expanding loan forgiveness, the Caucus seeks to alleviate financial pressures and sustain a committed workforce of public service attorneys dedicated to serving their communities. This initiative reflects the Caucus's commitment to justice and equity in New York's legal system.

### **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.

## Expanding Service and Civic Engagement Opportunities in New York State

The Caucus supports an investment of **\$9.35 million** to expand the Office of Service and Civic Engagement’s programs, which harness New Yorkers’ dedication to solving critical challenges and strengthening communities.

- **Double the Empire State Service Corps**, increasing participation from 515 to 1,100 SUNY and CUNY students to address food insecurity, mental health, education inequities, and environmental needs.
- **Launch Three New Service Programs:**
  - **Justice Corps:** Mobilize 100 justice-involved adults to support reentry efforts.
  - **Excelsior Veterans Corps:** Deploy 100 veterans to assist peers facing food insecurity, housing challenges, and mental health needs.
  - **Technical Assistance Corps:** Engage 20 New Yorkers to support local governments, small farms, and community-based organizations.
- **Establish a Youth Advisory Council** to focus on leadership development, voter registration, and civics education among young people.

With this investment, New York State will empower individuals, address pressing challenges, and foster stronger civic engagement statewide.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

*"Agency & Action"*

### HUMAN SERVICES

**Migrant Services and Assistance:** The Executive proposes \$2.4 billion in funding to assist with the costs of various services and assistance for asylum seekers arriving in New York State.

**Housing Initiatives:** The Executive includes proposals related to housing development in New York City, including a deadline extension for certain 421-a projects and new tax incentives.

**Redevelopment of Underutilized Sites for Housing (NY-RUSH):** The Executive proposes \$250 million to support the repurposing of property owned by state agencies for use as housing.

**Child Care Workforce Incentives:** The Executive proposal allocates \$280 million in remaining federal pandemic funds towards the continuation of the Workforce Retention Grant program.

**Anti-Poverty Efforts in Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo:** The Executive proposes \$50 million in one-time Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) resources to address immediate needs of children and families living in poverty in these localities.

**Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Food Benefits:** The Executive proposes \$13 million to implement a federal program to provide EBT benefits to low-income families with school-aged children during summer months.

**Resilient and Ready Program:** The Executive proposal includes \$40 million for a new Resilient and Ready Fund to provide assistance for emergency home repairs resulting from natural disasters.

**COVID-19 Sick Leave:** The Executive proposal includes language which would sunset the state's COVID-19 Sick Leave law on July 31, 2024

**Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA):** The Executive proposes a 1.5 percent COLA for human services agencies



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### **HUMAN SERVICES**



My name is Anna Chen, I am an Intake/Outreach coordinator at the Chinese-American Planning Council and I worked directly with community members to help them access the Excluded Workers Fund. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 60,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible,

culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

The Excluded Workers Fund has been a valuable source for many of our immigrant communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. I saw firsthand how the fund has supported our community members tremendously in being able to pay for basic necessities such as food, rent, and transportation. While the fund was active, we experienced an extremely high volume of calls and fielded many questions around eligibility, fears around status, and the complicated process of document collection. As others have shared, the process was incredibly challenging given the high demand and needs of our members, many of whom are less fluent in navigating the web and/or have limited English proficiency. Even still, there were many community members I worked with whose application was denied and to this day we still receive requests from people trying to access the funding even though it has run out.

The Chinese-American Planning Council urges the State legislature to replenish the Excluded Workers Fund with \$3 billion and create a permanent alternative to Unemployment Insurance via the "Excluded No More" legislation, which is sponsored by Sen. Jessica Ramos and Assemblymember Karines Reyes and awaiting a bill number. Short-term and long-term recovery plans need to be centered upon our most vulnerable communities. The funds have run out yet there are still thousands of New Yorkers struggling to survive and navigate through this pandemic. New York State has more than enough money to do this. The state is experiencing a surge in revenue: it has received billions more in taxes than expected last year.

For the first time the state doesn't anticipate any budget gaps in the next 4 fiscal years. There is enough incoming revenue to take care of all New Yorkers, including excluded workers. It is imperative that the State replenishes the fund to ensure that those individuals get the support that they need and that there is a permanent solution in which our immigrant communities can access relief benefits that extend beyond the pandemic." -Anna Chen, Intake/Outreach coordinator at the Chinese-American Planning Council



## **A Livable Wage for Human Services Workers**

To ensure fair compensation for New York's human services workers, the Caucus advocates for establishing a 7.8% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) human services workers. This initiative includes creating a comprehensive wage and benefit schedule that aligns with comparable City and State employee roles, ensuring pay parity and career advancement opportunities. A phased funding increase should support full parity, complemented by an immediate reserve for workforce stabilization. An annual COLA, pegged to the consumer price index, is essential to maintaining long-term parity.

## **BUMP (Bring Up Minimum Pay)**

The Caucus supports efforts to enact the BUMP legislation which would focus on improving wages, providing access to professional development opportunities, and addressing workforce retention challenges for human service workers, with an emphasis on those serving Black communities. By investing in this critical sector, the BUMP campaign aims to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of human services, uplift the workers who provide essential care, and improve outcomes for the communities they serve.

## **Addressing the Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce Crisis**

The Caucus calls for immediate action to address the severe challenges facing the Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce. Non-profit provider agencies, responsible for supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), are grappling with unsustainable vacancy and turnover rates due to stagnant wages and rising operational costs.

This workforce, predominantly composed of women (74.2%) and individuals from Black, African American, Asian, or Latino backgrounds (62.6%), highlights the pressing need to address wage inequities and create an inclusive, supportive environment. DSPs are critical yet undercompensated, with 50% experiencing food and housing insecurity. Despite 44% of DSPs holding college degrees, 80% earn less than \$20 an hour.

To stabilize this essential workforce, the Caucus supports:

- A 7.8% increase in provider rates in the SFY 2025-26 Budget to enable competitive wages and address rising costs.
- The establishment of a wage commission to study and develop long-term strategies for sustainable wage growth in the DSP and Human Services sectors.



## **Putting Children & Families First:**

### **Universal Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Services**

To address systemic inequities in healthcare, the Caucus supports a \$175 million allocation for universal newborn nurse home visiting services. These services aim to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, improve child health and development, and promote positive parenting. By providing education, maternal support, and early intervention, this program will significantly benefit New York's most marginalized families and foster equitable health outcomes.

### **The Universal Child Care Act**

Recognizing the crisis in New York's childcare system, the Caucus calls for a \$5 billion investment to establish universal childcare. This includes:

- \$3 billion for childcare subsidies to guarantee affordable, culturally responsive childcare.
- \$1 billion for workforce stabilization, ensuring childcare professionals earn wages at parity with public school educators.
- \$600 million for a transitional reimbursement rate model.
- \$400 million for infrastructure development to expand childcare accessibility statewide.

### **Guaranteeing Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families**

The Caucus supports making childcare assistance (CCAP) a state-funded entitlement for families earning less than 250% of the federal poverty level. This policy will ensure all eligible low-income New Yorkers can access affordable childcare. To meet growing demand, the Caucus advocates for a \$300 million increase in state funding for CCAP in the 2025-26 budget.

### **Supporting Children with Special Needs in Child Care**

To eliminate barriers for children with special needs, the Caucus proposes increasing the enhanced rates for special needs care to 30% of the market rate (up from 15%). This \$5 million investment will enable childcare providers to better serve children with special needs and streamline the process for receiving enhanced rates. These measures will create a more inclusive and equitable childcare system statewide.

### **Quality Child Care Workforce Compensation Program**

To sustain the childcare workforce, the Caucus recommends implementing a wage enhancement program modeled on successful initiatives in Washington, D.C., and New Mexico. This program would provide substantial wage supplements for licensed providers while the Child Care Availability Task Force develops long-term compensation structures. Additionally, a state-funded program should offer childcare subsidies for immigrant families excluded from federal funding programs.

## **Nutrition Support and Hunger Solutions:**

### **Supporting SNAP4All**

The Caucus advocates for the creation of a “SNAP4All” program in the 2025-26 budget to extend food benefits to low-income households excluded from federal SNAP eligibility due to citizenship status. Over 800,000 New Yorkers, including undocumented individuals and DACA recipients, face food insecurity without this vital support. SNAP4All would improve health outcomes, reduce poverty, and stimulate local economies, aligning with the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council’s strategy to support 65,000 households with an average benefit of \$2,100 per family. Including this initiative in the budget ensures equitable access to essential resources for all New Yorkers.

### **Enhancing SNAP Benefits**

Food insecurity remains an urgent challenge in New York, with low-income households bearing the brunt of economic inequities. Increasing the SNAP minimum monthly benefit from \$23 to \$100 would significantly enhance purchasing power for over 107,000 households, many of which are in urban centers like Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester. This targeted investment would uplift communities most in need and affirm the state’s commitment to food security as a basic human right.

### **Strengthening Nutrition Assistance Programs**

To combat hunger, the Caucus advocates for \$75 million each for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and Nourish New York. These programs provide emergency food aid and support for vulnerable adults and children. Additionally, \$5.45 million should be allocated to the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) to expand SNAP outreach and application assistance.

### **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Outreach**

To maintain access to healthy meals for children in childcare and afterschool programs, the Caucus supports continued annual funding of \$250,000 for CACFP outreach efforts. This funding ensures that eligible programs can navigate and utilize available resources effectively.

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## **Strengthening the Social Safety Net:**

### **Modernizing Social Service Delivery**

Accessing government benefits and nonprofit services should be simple and efficient. Pilot programs that integrate digital access to multiple benefits, allow non-taxable savings for education or job training, and partner with low-cost banking services can revolutionize service delivery. These initiatives would empower low-income individuals to build financial security while navigating the system more effectively.

## **Community & Family Reinvestment Act (CFRA)**

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.

## **Family 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.

## **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.

## **Preventive Services Housing Subsidy**

Housing stability is essential for youth transitioning out of care. The Caucus recommends amending the preventive services housing subsidy to extend eligibility to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) youth until they turn 24. This change would allow youth leaving care at age 21 to receive the maximum benefit of \$725 monthly for up to three years, ensuring a smoother transition to independent living and reducing the risk of homelessness.

## **Disability Advocacy Program (DAP)**

The Disability Advocacy Program (DAP) provides life-saving support for disabled New Yorkers who have been wrongly denied or terminated from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability (SSD) benefits. The Caucus urges a total allocation of \$1.5 million, in addition to the Executive's proposal, to address the ongoing needs of these individuals, particularly in Black and Brown communities disproportionately affected by systemic inequities. With federal backlogs and delays, DAP ensures that vulnerable populations have access to legal representation, saving the state millions in avoided public assistance costs.

## **Veterans Defense Program**

Veterans facing legal challenges deserve tailored support that recognizes their unique service and sacrifices. The Caucus recommends \$1.2 million in funding to sustain the Veterans Defense Program, which offers specialized legal assistance and resources for veterans navigating the justice system.

### **Supporting Aging New Yorkers:**

#### **Automatic Enrollment in Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) Programs**

Too many eligible seniors miss out on vital rent relief due to a lack of outreach and enrollment barriers. The Caucus is advocating for auto-enrollment policies in SCRIE programs across localities, ensuring that low-income seniors can afford to remain in their homes without facing unsustainable rent increases.

#### **Investing in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)**

Supporting aging-in-place initiatives is critical as New York's population grows older. Expanding funding for NORCs and Neighborhood NORCs (NNORCs) will provide essential health and social services to seniors, enabling them to remain independent in their communities. A proposed increase of \$1 million in funding will bring total support to \$9.055 million, enhancing these vital programs and ensuring their sustainability.

#### **Invest in the Master Plan for Aging**

The Caucus supports an additional \$3 million in funding of a comprehensive Master Plan for Aging to address the long-term needs of New York's rapidly aging population. This initiative would ensure that policies and resources are aligned to provide holistic support for older adults, enabling them to age in place with dignity and stability.

#### **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).

#### **Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP)**

Older adults require accessible, affordable services to maintain independence and quality of life. The Caucus calls for a \$42 million increase in funding for the In-Home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP). This investment will address significant service gaps and reduce delays in personal care, meal delivery, and home modifications, which currently leave 18,000 needs unmet. Expanding EISEP is not only humane but cost-effective, with services costing less than \$10,000 annually compared to \$100,000 for nursing home care. A prior \$15 million investment demonstrated significant Medicaid savings of \$50 million.

## **Strengthening Guardianship Services**

The Caucus supports \$15 million for a Statewide Initiative of Nonprofit Guardians (SING) to provide essential, person-centered guardianship services to 1,500 New Yorkers annually. This investment will sustain programs across the state, ensuring that individuals without family or friends to serve as guardians can access trusted nonprofit support instead of profit-driven entities. SING funding will help programs remain operational, expand into underserved counties, and meet rising needs without interruption. By reducing unnecessary court proceedings and preserving judicial resources, this initiative will allow judges to fulfill their mandate under Article 81 efficiently. This funding will protect the dignity and well-being of vulnerable New Yorkers and create a fair, accessible elder care system across the state.

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## **Domestic Violence Funding Remodeling**

The Caucus supports the following funding model for Domestic Violence (DV) services: (1) Restructuring funding from the per diem “head in bed” model to support the needs of single adult DV survivors, such as trafficking, older adult and LGBTQ+ survivors, 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 state funding to complement Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other federal funding streams for DV services; (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 Urban Resource Institute’s (URI) Economic Empowerment Program (EEP), which is a domestic violence program.

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## ***Equity and Investments:***

### **Advancing Black New Yorkers**

The caucus supports allocating \$50 million in the FY 2026 budget to empower Black-led community-based organizations (CBOs) to address systemic inequities and underserved needs across New York State. This funding would enhance economic empowerment, education, workforce development, mental health services, and social programs for Black communities, with targeted support for urban, suburban, and upstate areas. By investing in this initiative, New York State can foster equity and uplift Black New Yorkers statewide.

## **Middle Eastern and North African Equity Budget**

The Caucus supports \$5 million in funding for the Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC), which empowers immigrants and refugees with tools to successfully acclimate and become active participants in their communities. AAFSC’s mission to uplift underserved individuals through culturally responsive services is critical in addressing social service gaps and amplifying community voices statewide. A targeted investment will ensure these vital programs continue to meet the needs of Middle Eastern and North African communities across New York.

## **AAPI Equity Budget**

The caucus endorses an investment of \$55 million to support Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities statewide. Led by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) and the Asian American Federation (AAF), this funding ensures that AAPI-led and serving CBOs can fill urgent social service gaps using culturally responsive and linguistic approaches.

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## **NYS Office of Gun Violence Prevention**

To coordinate and manage gun violence prevention resources, initiatives, data, and policy solutions, the caucus recommends codifying and expanding the New York State Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP). The office will be permanently established within the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and collaborate with an Advisory Council which will include key stakeholders from all levels of government.

## **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 2025-2026 budget towards this goal.

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## **Ensuring Funding for Native Nations:**

### **Shinnecock Elder Caregiver Program (ECP)**

Launched as a pilot program in December 2022, Shinnecock Elder Caregiver Program (ECP), delivered vital outpatient and health management services to Shinnecock tribal elders, improving overall health outcomes. Unfortunately, due to funding shortfalls, the program ceased operations this past summer. Securing this funding would allow the Shinnecock Nation to revive the program and expand its services over the next five years. The Caucus supports a \$5 million appropriation is needed in the FY 2025-26 New York State Budget to reestablish this vital program.

### **Support for Native Schools**

The Caucus calls for a \$20 million investment for essential rehabilitation and renovation projects at Native schools located on the Onondaga, St. Regis Mohawk, and Tuscarora reservations. Years of underfunding have left critical infrastructure in disrepair. This funding would ensure that Native students have access to safe, updated learning environments that support their academic growth and well-being.

### **American Indian Health Program (AIHP)**

State spending on Native Nation health clinics has remained stagnant since the early 2000s, severely compromising healthcare access for Indigenous communities. The Caucus calls for an additional \$6.5 million is needed to support state-funded Indian Nation health clinics, alongside \$2 million for the American Indian Health Program (AIHP) to improve staffing and administration. Together, this funding would ensure the AIHP's total FY 2025-26 budget reaches \$33.5 million, maintaining recent progress and modestly expanding critical healthcare services to meet the pressing needs of Native citizens.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: LABOR

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**Empire Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The Executive proposes \$275 million in capital grants and other funding sources, to be matched by \$125 million in private funding, for an AI computing consortium.

**One Network for Regional Advanced Manufacturing Partnerships (ON-RAMP):** The Executive proposes \$200 million in new and existing capital resources to establish regional workforce development centers located along the I-90 Corridor.

**FAST-NY Shovel Ready Grant Program:** The Executive proposes \$100 million in grants to support the preparation and development of prospective construction sites.

**New County Partnership Grants Program:** The Executive proposes \$135 million to support infrastructure projects of local governments outside of New York City.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

*"Agency & Action"*

### **LABOR, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORTATION**

“Nearly one in five New Yorkers live with a disability. In 2024, 115,000 New Yorkers will receive a cancer diagnosis. Many others will have a cardiac event, a mental health crisis, manage long COVID, survive gun violence, or a car crash, manage a complicated pregnancy or another unexpected condition requiring time off work. Our current TDI program forces workers to choose between their health and their paycheck, creating housing instability for too many New Yorkers.

At the same time, our PFL program to bond with a new child or care for a seriously ill loved one is in need of updating to ensure a more inclusive family definition, a less restrictive waiting period, and an easier opt-in for self-employed workers. No New Yorker should ever be threatened with eviction while trying to care for themselves and their family. New York has two programs for paid leave: PFL to care for a loved one with a serious illness, or to bond with a new child and TDI to care for yourself.

Currently, New Yorkers who need to take TDI are only compensated with a maximum of \$170 a week without guarantee of job protection or health insurance. TDI has not been updated since 1989, and it is absurd to think New Yorkers can survive on wages stuck in the 1980s. That means that you can find yourself trying to manage a health condition, lose your job, your paycheck and your health insurance all for trying to take care of yourself. In particular, Latinx and Black workers reported higher rates of not taking any leave or taking shorter leave due to fear of losing their job than white workers, and Black and Latinx mothers are more likely than white mothers to be terminated for taking leave. It shouldn't be this way.

Improving our PFL and TDI programs will support all New Yorkers, including birthing people who have complicated pregnancies and need to take time off of work to rest in order to keep their pregnancies healthy. It will also combat the Black maternal health crisis by ensuring that those who need to take paid, protected leave are able to do so. Workers with chronic illnesses will be able to manage their conditions and continue to contribute to the workforce. New York has a substance use crisis, but without access to paid, protected leave, many are unable to access the care they need. An improved paid family and medical leave program will help to fix this. The need for medical leave can impact anyone.

All New Yorkers – and especially low-wage and BIPOC workers who disproportionately bear the burden of these gaps in the law – need a real paid leave program we can survive on.” - **Moriah Engelberg, Organizer at A Better Balance**



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### **LABOR**

#### **Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI)**

The Caucus strongly supports modernizing Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) to provide essential wage replacement and protections for New York workers facing off-the-job illnesses, injuries, or pregnancy-related disabilities, including recovery from childbirth. Since its inception in 1949, TDI has remained stagnant, offering inadequate income support with a capped benefit of \$170 per week and lacking necessary employment and healthcare protections. The Executive has outlined TDI as top priority for her administration and it is time to get it done. Additionally, the Caucus calls for 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 is a particularly urgent matter for women, as approximately 30% of health-related benefit claims are tied to pregnancy outcomes.

#### **Empowering Young New Yorkers Through Year-Round Employment**

The Caucus calls for a \$1 billion investment in a statewide youth employment and work readiness program for young people aged 16-24. This initiative will provide year-round opportunities for participants to explore diverse career pathways, develop productive workplace habits, and gain critical social, civic, and leadership skills. By prioritizing young New Yorkers, this program will foster economic opportunity, enhance skill development, and prepare the next generation for success in the workforce.

#### **Addressing Bias in Civil Service Exams**

The Caucus supports directing the Department of Civil Service to conduct a comprehensive study on competitive civil service examinations to identify and address potential discriminatory effects on minority examinees. Ensuring fairness and equity in public employment exams is vital to creating a workforce that reflects New York's diversity. This initiative is an essential step toward equitable access to public sector opportunities for all communities.

#### **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.

## **A Just Workforce Transition:**

### **Supporting Worker Transition Programs**

The Caucus advocates for a suite of initiatives aimed at supporting workers displaced by the energy transition. This includes:

- An Individual Worker Assurance Pilot funded at \$125 million to provide wage guarantees, income support, or early retirement options for displaced workers.
- An \$18 million Healthy Air and Healthy Jobs Pilot to retrain workers for public health and teaching careers.
- A \$10 million Layoff Avoidance Pilot to incentivize employers to transition employees to new roles or industries rather than issuing layoffs.

### **Investing in the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University**

The Caucus recognizes the critical role of the Climate Jobs Institute (CJI) at Cornell University's ILR School in advancing the transition to a clean energy economy. With a proposed \$10 million funding increase, CJI will continue to address climate challenges while creating high-quality jobs and building an inclusive workforce. Its expertise in research, technical support, and stakeholder engagement uniquely positions it to guide policymakers and advocate for equitable solutions at the intersection of labor and environmental goals.

### **Investing in Climate and Clean Energy Workforce Development**

The Caucus recommends \$22 million for Clean Energy Hub Workforce Development Grants to support apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and internships in climate and clean energy fields. These programs will prepare workers for family-sustaining jobs while supporting New York's transition to a green economy.

### **Strengthening Pension Support for Unionized Workers**

The Caucus supports a \$3 million Pension Liquidity and Support Study to ensure union pension funds remain stable and liquid as energy transitions impact traditional industries.

## **Equity and Support:**

### **Building up New York's Workforce:**

#### **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.

#### **Workforce Development Institute (WDI)**

The Caucus supports \$4 million for the Workforce Development Institute to expand opportunities for inclusive hiring, training, and retention programs statewide. These efforts ensure working families achieve economic self-sufficiency.

#### **WDI Manufacturing Institute**

To foster innovation and workforce development in manufacturing, the Caucus calls for a \$1 million investment in the Workforce Development Institute's Manufacturing Initiative. This funding will support training programs, research, and industry partnerships.

#### **YouthBuild**

With an emphasis on empowering at-risk youth through education, job training, and leadership development, the Caucus supports \$3 million for YouthBuild programs across New York State. This funding will provide resources for program expansion and participant support services.

#### **CSKILLS Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program**

With an allocation of \$500,000, the CSKILLS program opens doors for NYC residents to join unionized building and construction trades, offering high wages, health benefits, and retirement security. The Caucus views this as a pivotal step in addressing workforce equity and economic mobility.

#### **Incarcerated Workers Act**

The Caucus supports the Incarcerated Workers Act to ensure fair labor rights and equitable compensation for incarcerated individuals. This reform promotes dignity and prepares workers for reintegration into society. Implementation is estimated at \$3.5 million to cover administrative and compliance costs.

## **Cornell Worker Institute and Cannabis Workforce Initiative**

The Caucus backs continued support for the Cornell Worker Institute and the Cannabis Workforce Initiative, which provide critical education and training for workers in emerging industries. Funding of \$2 million is proposed to expand outreach and program delivery.

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### **Workplace Protections and Health Initiatives:**

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **Expanding Telemedicine Access for Workplace Injuries**

Injured workers often face significant barriers to accessing the care they need, particularly for mental and behavioral health issues stemming from workplace injuries. The Caucus proposes allowing injured workers to receive necessary treatment through telemedicine, which would improve equity in healthcare access for individuals regardless of their geographic location. This approach ensures timely, comprehensive care for those recovering from work-related injuries. To support this initiative, the Caucus advocates for \$5 million towards telemedicine infrastructure, provider reimbursements, and outreach programs to inform workers of this critical resource.

### **Enhancing Mental Health Awareness in the Workplace**

To prioritize mental health and wellness, the Caucus recommends that the Department of Labor create and distribute multilingual materials detailing available mental health services and resources for workplace posting. Employers are further encouraged to adopt voluntary guidance promoting strategies and programs that support employees' mental health. By fostering awareness and providing resources, this initiative can cultivate healthier and more supportive work environments across the state. The Caucus supports a \$2 million allocation in the 2025-26 budget to cover the development, translation, and dissemination of materials, ensuring accessibility for all New Yorkers.

### **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.





## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

### ***ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

#### **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.

#### **Supporting the Rochester Public Bank Initiative**

The Caucus backs the establishment of the Rochester Public Bank to promote economic equity and reinvest public funds into local businesses, affordable housing, and infrastructure. Public banks address disparities in access to credit and financial services while fostering community development and resilience. To advance this initiative, the Caucus advocates for **\$5 million** in the FY 2025-26 budget for a feasibility study and pilot programs. This investment supports planning, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure development to ensure the bank's success, empowering marginalized communities and strengthening local economies.

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**Supporting Small Businesses:**

**Establishing a Downstate MWBE Center**

To better support MWBE owners navigating certification, procurement, and business growth, the Caucus proposes creating a Downstate MWBE Center. This center will provide in-person services, streamline access to Empire State Development's Division of Minority and Women's Business Development (DMWBD), and consolidate federal, state, and local resources under one roof. The center will enhance MWBE utilization goals, improve procurement diversity, and ease certification processes through initiatives like the recently passed MWBE reciprocity agreement between New York State and New York City.

**Small Business Security Grant Fund**

The Caucus supports establishing a Small Business Security Grant Fund to assist small businesses, including bodegas and grocery stores, in meeting their physical security needs. This fund will also encourage preparedness activities and foster collaboration between businesses and agencies in emergencies. Investing in the security of high-risk businesses will not only protect owners and customers but also promote resilience in communities across the states.

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**Strengthening Support for the Arts:**

**Fund the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)**

The Caucus calls for an increase to the baseline funding of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) to \$200 million in the 2025-26 budget cycle. This investment is critical to stabilizing New York's cultural economy, supporting thousands of arts organizations, and providing employment for cultural workers in communities across the state. For over 15 years, NYSCA's baseline funding has remained stagnant, despite the growing needs of the arts and cultural sector. Increased funding would ensure that arts organizations, particularly those in underserved areas, have the resources to thrive and continue enriching New York's cultural landscape. Investing in NYSCA is a direct investment in the state's economy, education, and community vitality.

**BIPOC Artist Funding**

New York's working artists and performers were 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.

## **Culture & Arts Funding**

The Caucus recommends including \$10 million in the budget to fund the NY250 commission that would distribute funds for museums and historical societies to tell an inclusive story of how New York and New Yorkers have contributed to the advancement of democracy in our nation.

## **Enhancing Public Access to Cultural Institutions**

The Caucus recommends Empire State Development, in collaboration with relevant agencies, conduct a comprehensive study to explore ways to expand access to cultural and arts institutions statewide. This initiative will strengthen public engagement with New York's cultural heritage, ensuring equitable opportunities for all residents to benefit from these world-class resources.

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## **Expanding NY SWIMS**

The Caucus calls for \$50 million in additional funding to expand the NY SWIMS program, allowing community-based organizations to become eligible entities. This investment will broaden access to critical workforce training and development opportunities across the state.

## **Supporting YMCA Community Programs**

The Caucus advocates for \$5 million in dedicated funding to ensure YMCAs can continue providing essential services such as childcare, water safety programs, and public health initiatives. These programs play a vital role in supporting families and fostering community well-being.

## **Black Farmers United of New York State**

The Caucus is calling for a \$30 million allocation to Black Farmers United of New York State. This is in juxtaposition with the expenses of programs and services needed to support capacity building, training, and advocacy for farm and food businesses owned by people of color in 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.

## **Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive Program**

The Caucus supports increasing funding for the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive Program, which encourages schools to spend at least 30% of their meal costs on New York-produced foods. Expanding the program to include breakfast reimbursement will amplify its impact, generating nearly \$500 million in economic benefits, supporting local farmers, and increasing student access to healthy meals. This initiative aligns with the state's goals of promoting agriculture while addressing food insecurity in schools.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: TRANSPORTATION

**Department of Transportation (DOT) Capital Plan:** The Executive proposal funds the third year of the five-year DOT Capital Plan of \$32.9 billion, a 19.6 percent increase from plans adopted in the previous five years.

**Non-MTA Transit Capital:** The DOT Capital Plan includes \$139.5 million in non-MTA transit capital assistance in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024-25. This amount includes the continuation of \$20 million for the bus electrification program.

**Local Capital Construction Programs:** The DOT Capital Plan includes appropriation levels of \$538.1 million for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPs); \$39.7 million for the Marchiselli Program; \$150 million for local Pave NY; \$100 million for Extreme Winter Recovery; \$100 million for the State Touring Route Program; \$200 million for local Bridge NY; and \$100 million for Operation Pave Our Potholes. These levels reflect the elimination of \$100 million from SFY 2023-24, including \$60 million from CHIPs and \$40 million from the State Touring Route Program.

**Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Operating Budget:** The MTA's operating budget is balanced through 2027, reflecting increased dedicated tax revenues and other funding agreements enacted in SFY 2023-24.

**Transit Operating Assistance:** The Executive recommends \$8.6 billion in annual support for transit systems statewide, including the MTA, reflecting an increase of 7.0 percent from SFY 2023-24.

**Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) Transformation:** The Executive proposal includes \$178.5 million to continue information technology upgrades to improve service for both in-person and online transactions.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET

*"Agency & Action"*

### **TRANSPORTATION**

#### **Fully Funding the MTA Capital Plan**

The Caucus strongly supports fully funding the MTA Capital Plan in the 2025-26 fiscal year. This includes critical projects such as the Second Avenue Subway Expansion and the Interborough Express rapid transit line. These investments will improve connectivity, reduce congestion, and create long-term economic benefits for New York City and its surrounding regions.

#### **Continuing the MTA Free Bus Pilot Program**

The Caucus urges the continuation of the MTA free bus pilot program, which expired in August 2024. This program has demonstrated success in improving transit equity and reducing commuting costs for low-income residents. Funding should be reinstated and expanded in the 2025-26 budget to ensure its benefits are sustained.

#### **Providing Free or Reduced Metrocards for CUNY Students**

The Caucus recommends extending free or reduced cost Metrocards to CUNY students. With an estimated cost lower than the current \$75.5 million OMNY program for DOE students, this initiative would significantly alleviate transportation costs for 225,000 students, promoting equitable access to higher education.

#### **Enhancing MTA Service in NYC**

To meet the goal of citywide average service, wait times below six minutes, the Caucus recommends allocating \$400 million in the 2025-26 budget to expand MTA service. This funding will reduce delays and improve reliability for millions of daily riders.

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#### **Revitalizing and Expanding Airports**

The Caucus calls for targeted funding to support airport revitalization and expansion programs. These investments will enhance New York's transportation infrastructure, increase regional connectivity, and support economic growth through improved logistics and passenger services.

### **Studying High-Speed Rail Feasibility**

The Caucus supports \$250,000 in funding for the NYS Thruway Authority to study the feasibility of utilizing Thruway Authority land for a high-speed rail line. This initiative will lay the groundwork for future transportation innovation, providing faster and more sustainable travel options.

### **Support Transit Deserts Across the State:**

#### **Expanding Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Programs**

An additional \$100 million should be allocated to expand BRT programs for transit agencies outside New York City. These funds will provide faster, more reliable transit options for underserved communities, reducing commute times and improving access to employment and education opportunities.

#### **Enhancing Upstate Transportation Authorities**

The Caucus backs increased funding of \$30 million for upstate transportation authority's such as the CDTA, NFTA, and CNYRTA to improve service reliability and access to employment hubs. These investments will support regional transit systems that are critical for economic growth and mobility in upstate communities.

#### **Expanding Transit Service Statewide**

The Caucus supports \$400 million in additional funding to expand transit services statewide, achieving a goal of average wait times below 10 minutes. This initiative will increase accessibility and efficiency for transit users in all regions of New York State.

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### **Investing in Department of Transportation Capital Plan:**

#### **Addressing Inflation in NYSDOT Capital Program**

To counteract the effects of inflation on highway construction materials, the Caucus recommends a one-time \$800 million increase to the NYSDOT Capital Program in the 2025-26 budget. This investment is necessary to preserve the integrity of the state's five-year capital plan and maintain project timelines.

#### **Increasing Statewide Mass Transportation Operating Assistance (STOA)**

The Caucus advocates for a \$100 million increase to STOA in the 2025-26 budget. These funds are vital to maintaining and enhancing transit services across the state, ensuring affordability and reliability for millions of New Yorkers who depend on public transportation.

#### **Increasing CHIPS Funding for Local Road and Bridge Improvements**

The Caucus supports an additional \$50 million for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS). This funding will empower local governments to address critical infrastructure needs, improving safety and accessibility for communities across New York State.



### **Strengthening Highway Infrastructure Program (SHIPS)**

The Caucus supports a \$200 million allocation for the Strengthening Highway Infrastructure Program (SHIPS) in the 2025-26 budget. This investment will address critical maintenance needs for aging highways and bridges, mitigate inflationary impacts on construction costs, and ensure the timely completion of vital transportation projects statewide. By prioritizing public safety and regional connectivity, SHIPS will empower local governments to enhance infrastructure reliability, reduce long-term repair costs, and support economic growth in suburban communities across New York.

### **Designating Nassau-Suffolk MPO**

The Caucus advocates for the designation of the Nassau-Suffolk Transportation Coordinating Committee as the metropolitan planning organization for Long Island. This change would provide localized oversight and better address the transportation needs of Long Island residents.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### EXECUTIVE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS: PUBLIC PROTECTION

**Organized Retail Theft Prevention:** The Executive provides \$40.2 million for retail theft prevention: \$25.2 million in new funding to deploy a dedicated State Police team to build cases against organized retail theft rings and create a new State Police enforcement unit; \$10 million in funding for District Attorneys to prosecute property crime cases; and \$5 million in additional funding to build the capacity of local law enforcement efforts to combat retail theft.

**Domestic Violence Prevention and Prosecution:** The Executive includes \$40.8 million to reduce assaults with a focus on domestic violence outside the City of New York. This is comprised of \$35.8 million for district attorneys to expand the domestic Violence STAT Model and the continuation of a \$5 million grant program to victims of domestic violence utilized to cover expenses in emergency situations.

**Civil Legal Services Grants Increase:** The Executive proposes to transfer \$10 million in funding from the Interest on Lawyer Account (IOLA) to non-profits that provide civil legal services to lower income New Yorkers.

**Securing Communities Against Hate Crimes (SCAHC):** The Executive Budget provides an additional \$10 million for the next round of the SCAHC program, for total funding of \$35 million.

**Prison Closures:** The Executive includes a proposal to effectuate the closure of five correctional facilities with 90-day notice prior to closure.

**Emergency Preparedness:** The Executive provides \$15 million in funding to supply local and county governments with additional generators, high-flow pumps, flood barrier technology, and other equipment used in response to flooding and other weather emergencies. Additionally, the Executive provides \$10.4 million in funding to the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Office of Emergency Management to increase the state's regional presence, to increase local planning and training, to provide additional tabletop exercises, and to improve analytic and geospatial capabilities.



## 2025 PEOPLE'S BUDGET *"Agency & Action"*

### **CIVIL RIGHTS & CRIMINAL JUSTICE**



"In 2017, my life was completely different. I lived in El Salvador, the only country I've ever called home. I loved El Salvador but core parts of my identity made me no longer welcome. My gender and sexual identity turned me into an outsider and the victim of relentless discrimination and death threats. That's why I made the difficult decision to leave my friends and family behind to find safety. After a yearlong journey, I finally declared asylum in the United States in 2022 and my life changed forever.

Seeking asylum was not an easy decision. To the more than 100,000 asylum seekers who've recently arrived in New York City, this journey is a leap of faith. Violence and persecution forced us to leave our loved ones behind in the hope that we could find safety and stability in the United States. We arrived with little to no money, and most of us don't yet speak English fluently. We're here because the United States and the Statue of Liberty are global symbols of hope and freedom, having welcomed generations of immigrants in search of refuge before us.

Life in the United States means I can be my true self. Shortly after arriving in New York, I began gender affirming care and introduced myself to the world as Bruneth. Here, I can express myself as I've always wanted to and wear clothes and accessories that finally make me feel comfortable in my own skin.

And while I'm so excited about the life I'm just beginning to build here, I never realized just how difficult it would be to apply for asylum and seek legal

assistance. Despite our limited knowledge of this country, the language, and the legal system, asylum seekers are required to file complex paperwork and represent ourselves in court if we cannot afford an attorney.

My search for legal representation was exhausting. I visited 16 different attorneys before I was able to secure representation. Each denial delivered a wave of hopelessness as I felt the looming 12-month deadline to apply for asylum inch closer and closer. Finally, on my 17th attempt, I found a pro-bono attorney willing to take on my case.

This legal representation has been a game changer. I'm proud to share that my asylum case is moving forward and I have recently received my work authorization. I am now a Peer Navigator with the Queer Detainee Empowerment Project (QDEP) where I accompany and lend emotional support to asylum seekers who are just starting their cases. I'm well aware that while I finally have the tools to plant my roots here, access to an attorney remains out of reach for too many asylum seekers.

That's why I'm proud to stand with the New York Immigration Coalition and the Campaign for Access, Representation and Equality (CARE) for Immigrant Families in support of the Access to Representation Act (ARA). This historic bill would guarantee access to an attorney to all New Yorkers navigating the immigration court system. Studies show that immigrants in detention are 10 times more likely to prove their right to remain in the United States if they have representation than those without any counsel.

The ARA is an investment in the entire legal system, boosting capacity for many service providers who are currently overworked and stretched thin with massive caseloads. The bill would increase the capacity of these providers so that no one would have to experience the 16 rejections that I did. No one will have to lose hope. –

**Bruneth Flores, member of the Campaign for Access, Representation & Equity (CARE) for Immigrant Families coalition.**

## **CIVIL RIGHTS**

### ***Uplifting and Safeguarding New Americans:***

New York stands as a beacon of hope and opportunity for immigrant communities worldwide, symbolized by the enduring legacy of the Statue of Liberty. As the incoming presidential administration signals plans to target immigration policies, it is vital that New York takes a strong and decisive stance to uphold its values and protect its residents. These actions could lead to harmful and unconstitutional measures, threatening the well-being of our neighbors and families. The Caucus urges the Executive, state officials, and local leaders to work together to safeguard the civil rights of all New Yorkers, ensuring our state remains a place of refuge, fairness, and dignity for all. There must be no doubt that we will collectively uplift and protect our fellow New Yorkers.

### **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 increasing the allocation for immigration legal services to \$15.3 million (from its current \$10 million) and providing \$9.1 million to the Office for New Americans to ensure New Yorkers facing 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 of their contributions. This initiative covers all veterans, irrespective of sexual orientation or immigration status.

## **Expand Language Access**

The Caucus continues to support \$10 million 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:

- \$5 million would fund the development of learning language services cooperatives.
- \$3 million would increase the base funding for the New York State Office of Language Access.
- \$2 million would fund the training of community interpreters, the assessment of regional language needs, and the retention of interpreters.

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## **Elections Law & Voting Rights:**

### **Same Day Voter Registration**

The Caucus supports legislation that authorizes individuals who are qualified to register to vote but miss registration deadlines prior to an election to complete a conditional voter registration. These individuals would then cast an affidavit ballot, which would be canvassed once their registration is verified by the board of elections. This initiative would enable thousands of otherwise ineligible individuals to vote on Election Day or during early voting.

### **Protecting Voting Rights for Detained Individuals**

The Caucus advocates for approximately \$750,000 towards ensuring voting rights for individuals detained pre-trial by improving access to absentee ballots and voter registration materials. This initiative upholds democratic principles and ensures that all eligible voters can participate in the electoral process, regardless of their detention status

### **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 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.

### **Tax Relief for Election Day Workers**

The Caucus supports providing a state tax exemption for income earned by Election Day workers. This measure acknowledges the critical role these individuals play in facilitating the electoral process while offering financial relief to incentivize and reward their civic service. This will cost the state an estimated \$1.5 million dollars.

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### **Protecting the Integrity of the IOLA Fund**

The Caucus opposes diverting revenue from the IOLA Fund and urges its full restoration in the FY2025-26 budget. IOLA supports critical civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers, assisting over 639,000 individuals in FY24 and generating \$3.5 billion in economic impact. Diverting funds risks ethical uncertainty for attorneys, jeopardizing participation, and revenue. Preserving IOLA ensures access to justice and addresses the \$1 billion annual civil justice funding gap for vulnerable populations.

### **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. Action must be taken to assure parents facing these racially disparate and harsh systems have an attorney and other resources to protect their families from unwarranted separation. This will help prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their families and cultures.

### **5/14 Memorial**

The Caucus supports a \$5 million state contribution toward the construction of a permanent memorial honoring the victims of the tragic events of May 14th in Buffalo. This initiative aligns with the commitments already made by Governor Hochul, who allocated \$5 million, and the City of Buffalo, which contributed \$1 million, toward the projected \$15 million cost. The memorial will serve as a lasting tribute to those lost, fostering community healing and reflection.

## **Criminal Justice**

### **Strengthening Pathways to Successful Reintegration:**

#### **Creating a Centralized Office of Re-entry Services**

The Caucus recommends creating a centralized Office of Re-entry Services within the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). This office would coordinate programs addressing critical reentry needs, including housing, employment, and mental health support, beginning during incarceration, and continuing post-release. This initiative aligns with Governor Hochul's expansion of reentry services, which tripled investments to support approximately 7,500 individuals annually, up from 2,500, through County Reentry Task Forces.

#### **Establishing a Re-entry Fund**

The Caucus supports replacing the outdated "gate money" system with a reentry fund to provide individuals released from incarceration with \$425 per month for six months. This financial support would help address vital needs such as food, clothing, housing, healthcare, and employment preparation, promoting stability and reducing recidivism.

#### **Enhancing Reentry Funding in the 2025-26 Budget**

The Caucus advocates for increasing funding for reentry initiatives to \$10 million in the 2025-26 budget cycle. Building on the investments made in prior years, this expanded funding will strengthen programs proven to reduce recidivism and support successful reintegration for individuals transitioning from incarceration. The increased allocation will enhance transitional housing opportunities, provide comprehensive reentry services, and support tailored interventions such as mental health and employment readiness programs. By committing \$10 million, New York can demonstrate a continued dedication to fostering safer communities and ensuring formerly incarcerated individuals have the resources to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.



## **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.

True reentry reform must, at the very least, 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 expedite their hearings, and not jailing people for technical violations. For this reason, the Caucus supports the passage of Elder Parole as well as the Fair and Timely Parole Act, 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.

## **Reaffirming the Importance of Discovery Reform**

Discovery reform plays an essential role in bringing evidence to light promptly, supporting defendants' rights and prosecutorial efficiency. Efforts to roll back these reforms risk undermining the strides made toward transparency and justice. Maintaining and enhancing these reforms aligns with the State's commitment to equitable justice and avoiding the miscarriage of justice caused by delayed or incomplete disclosure of evidence.

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### **Oversight & Transparency:**

#### **State Commission of Correction (SCOC) Reform and Expansion**

To strengthen oversight of correctional facilities, the Caucus supports efforts to increase the number of members on the State Commission of Correction and provide a more transparent confirmation process. Members request a \$1.5 million allocation to support the operational expansion of the SCOC, ensuring it has the resources to fulfill its mandate effectively.

#### **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. To fortify CANY's critical mission, the Caucus strongly advocates for the allocation of \$500,000.

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### **Advancing Youth Justice Reform**

The Caucus is committed to ensuring equitable access to Raise the Age funding across all communities in New York State, including New York City. A proposed \$50 million allocation from the current budget is aimed at closing service gaps and expanding opportunities for youth. This initiative includes increasing access to record sealing and alternatives to incarceration, particularly for youth of color, empowering them to rebuild their lives and avoid the long-term consequences of a criminal record.

### **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. A fiscal analysis by the Fines and Fees Justice Center estimates that eliminating court fees in New York State would cost approximately \$30 million. The Caucus is calling for an end to New York’s predatory court fees.

### **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 legislation enabling incarcerated individuals to send up to 10 free electronic mail letters a day, promoting affordable communication with their families.

### **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-judgment 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, members 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, 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.

## **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 \$15,000,000 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.

## **Support for Public Interest Attorneys and Prosecutors**

The Caucus supports an allocation of an additional \$4 million to expand the funding for the HESC/DALF program, increasing the current funding from \$2 million to \$6 million. This investment is critical to retaining dedicated public interest attorneys and prosecutors in their public service roles. Adequate funding ensures that these professionals can continue serving their communities without the financial strain that often drives them to the private sector.

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## **Addressing Sexual Assault in Correctional Settings:**

### **Funding for Prison and Jail Cameras to Eliminate Blind Spots**

The Caucus proposes a \$10 million funding allocation to assist prisons and jails in acquiring and installing cameras to eliminate blind spots in facilities. This funding is essential to facilitate compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) and to cover deficits that delay or inhibit investigations into employee assaults on detainees. Additionally, the Caucus supports pending legislation to enhance state-level enforcement of PREA compliance, ensuring the safety and dignity of all incarcerated individuals.

### **Bringing Oversight to Corrections**

New York must prioritize accountability within its correctional system. The Caucus supports the creation of an independent Office of Correctional Ombudsman. This legislation provides a clear mechanism for protecting the dignity and safety of incarcerated individuals while ensuring transparency and justice are not compromised.

### **Restoring Trust in Discipline and Accountability**

Addressing serious misconduct within correctional facilities requires a system that works efficiently and fairly. The Caucus supports legislation empowering the Commissioner of Corrections and Community Supervision to directly discipline employees for severe infractions, replacing the reliance on external arbitrators. This change ensures swift, consistent action that strengthens internal oversight, and enhances safety for everyone in custody.

