



**Testimony**

**Of**

**Linda Tigani, MSW**

**Chair & Executive Director**

**NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE)**

**Before the**

**New York City Council**

**Committee on Civil & Human Rights Committee**

**On**

**Thursday, February 20, 2025**

**Oversight - The State of Black New York and the Racial Equity Planning Process**

Good morning, Chair, Dr. Nantasha Williams, and members of the Civil and Human Rights Committee. My name is Linda Tigani, and I have the honor of serving as the Chair and Executive Director of the NYC Commission on Racial Equity (CORE). I lead CORE in partnership with 14 Commissioners, and 10 staff members. Today, I would like to provide an overview of the role of CORE in the racial equity planning process, with a focus on our efforts in the 2024 racial equity planning cycle.

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The NYC Commission on Racial Equity was established through the November 2022 vote to hold NYC government accountable to advance racial equity in government operations and increase community voice in government decision making. Three of our five charter mandates speak to our role in the racial equity planning process. First, our Commission must identify and propose community equity priorities and outcome indicators relevant to the wellbeing of community members for possible inclusion in citywide and agency racial equity plans, in accordance with the equity planning schedule. Second, following the release of the preliminary and final citywide racial equity plan, the Commission shall make public a statement assessing the extent to which the plan is responsive to the community equity priorities, and make recommendations on strategy, indicators, and goals set forth in the plan. Third, CORE will track and publicly report on agency and citywide compliance with the racial equity planning process.

Government agencies must be held accountable to the racial equity planning process and timeline outlined in Chapter 78 of the NYC Charter. The City's racial equity planning process, set to occur biennially starting calendar year 2023, begins with CORE's submission of Community Equity Priorities and indicators due October 1st. Due to significant delay in my hiring, CORE missed the first deadline thereby pushing back the launch of the process by eight months. According to the Charter, the Chair and Executive Director and all Commissioners should have been in place no later than August 1, 2023. My first day was October 11, 2023. The Commission was not fully appointed until October 30, 2024.

Once I came on board, I hired a team of six staff members and supported elected officials to complete their appointments to the Commission. The second CORE staff member did not join until March 2024. Simultaneously, I worked closely with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice (MOERJ) to develop a revised timeline for the 2024 racial equity planning cycle, which was shared with the public via the MOERJ website. Commissioner Sideya Sherman of MOERJ and I agreed to the release of the preliminary racial equity plan no later than October 31, 2024, and a final plan no later than December 2024. As of today, the plans are 112 days late from the October 31<sup>st</sup> deadline and 399 days late from the original date in the charter. As a result of this delay, the Fiscal Year 2026 budgeting cycle has launched without the necessary guidance racial equity plans should provide to understanding the changes in investment strategy the city will take to ameliorate racial and social injustice.

**I would like to now provide an overview of the work CORE has done to move forward the 2024 racial equity planning process.**



The City's racial equity planning process begins with CORE's submission of the Community Equity Priorities (CEPs) and indicators. As defined in the charter, community equity priorities and indicators "consider those needs and priorities that local community members view as most relevant to their wellbeing, giving particular consideration to the priorities of groups or categories of community members that have been historically underrepresented in, or underserved by, government and its processes." We refer to these groups or categories of communities as communities harmed by racism and social injustice. In November 2023, CORE began drafting community equity priorities and speaking with partners across government and the public to ensure that community voices informed CORE's work early and in every stage of the process.

CORE is committed to ensuring communities harmed by racism and social injustice inform and guide all of our work. On May 13, 2024, CORE released 16 draft community equity priorities to city agencies and the public. Prior to public release, CORE received feedback on the draft priorities from 21 community-based organizations participating in the Taskforce on Racial Equity and Inclusion Neighborhood Network Initiative and NYC Participatory Budgeting program. Priorities were also shared with the Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice as well as the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives, Ana Almanzar.

On May 13, 2024, CORE presented the 16 draft community equity priorities at the Racial Equity Planning training. We shared the draft language, examples on how agencies can operationalize the priorities in their forthcoming plan and strongly recommended that each agency identify at least one priority in each fundamental value that they would respond to in their plan.

Community equity priorities were released in draft form so that CORE can solicit feedback from community organizations on the themes presented, add themes they felt may be missing, and provide edits to the language. Both the public and government partners were able to provide feedback through any of the following avenues: (1) online survey available in 12 languages; (2) public testimony via email; (3) host a CEP community conversation led by a community member; or (4) invite CORE to lead a CEP community conversation. We collected feedback from May through August of 2024. At the close of the inaugural engagement campaign, sixteen community equity priorities were finalized, and we added two new community equity priorities, all of which are reflected in the final two pages of my testimony.

Throughout our engagement, CORE worked with community to better understand and identify who are the communities harmed by racism and social injustice. The NYC Charter identifies the following groups as marginalized: "Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and other People of Color, women, religious minorities, immigrants, people who are LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities." Community members shared that they want CORE to include the following groups to receive particular consideration: youth, elders, people who are incarcerated, and people who are unhoused. Additionally, they requested that the Middle Eastern category be extended to include North African, and LGBTQ+ be extended to include intersex and asexual.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that the NYC Charter, our city constitution, upholds the LGBTQIA+ community as one that has experienced racism and discrimination. The Charter calls on us as government to stand firm in our support, and protection for the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community including their right to safety, prosperity, and their right to receive gender affirming care from NYC government and government contractors.

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Our organizing and engagement practice strives to center communities harmed by racism and social injustice. Over a four-month period, CORE received feedback from 4,212 respondents. We partnered with 42 organizations across the five boroughs, which yielded 220 CEP community conversations. In total, CORE spent \$410,000 on the first cycle of community organizing and engagement; \$390,000 to community organizations and \$20,000 in administrative costs.

Now, I would like to highlight the diversity of our respondent pool, which we believe is why the community equity priorities are in fact reflective of New York City population. Out of 4,212 respondents, 35.5 percent identified as Black or African American, 20.6 percent identified as Hispanic/ Latinx, 10.2 percent identified as Asian American, 5.8 percent identified as White, and 5.7 percent identified as Multiracial. Less than one percent of respondents identified in each of the following categories: Middle Eastern and North African, American Indian or Alaskan, Adopted or unknown, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. With respect to diversity of age, eight percent of respondents are between 10 - to 17-years-old, 21.3 percent were under the age of 25, 78.7 percent were 25 years or older, 17.4 percent are over age 65, and 86.2 percent are under the age of 65. Women made up 55.7 percent of our respondents, men made up 27.1 percent and less than one percent of respondents identified as non-binary, gender queer, TransMan, TransWoman, Agender, or multiple genders.

Respondents reflected a diversity of educational experience as well as disability and chronic conditions. With respect to diversity of education, 17.8 percent of respondents highest level of education was less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 17.6 percent reported having a high school graduate or similar degree, 12.8 percent reported some college, 11.5 percent reported having a bachelor's degree, 10.3 percent reported having a post-graduate degree, and 5.3 percent reporting having associate or trade school degree. Upwards of 46.4 percent of the respondents stated that they have either a disability or a chronic condition. We offered respondents the opportunity to share if they were multilingual, and their ancestry and ethnic origin. Respondents' ancestry included but not limited to Caribbean, Chinese, Lebanese, Central European Jewish, and Filipino. The preferred language of respondents includes, but is not limited to, Arabic, Cantonese, Urdu, and Wolof. Bronx respondents made up 23.5 percent of the respondent pool followed by Brooklyn at 22.4 percent, Queens at 15.2 percent and Staten Island at 8 percent. The Taskforce on Racial Equity and Inclusion neighborhoods made up 58.3 percent of the total response pool. All questions were voluntary, and respondents were provided the option "prefer not to answer."

CORE organizing and engagement practices center diversity, equity, and inclusion to hold NYC government accountable towards becoming a multi-racial democracy. We used a Likert scale, which asked respondents to identify their level of agreement or disagreement with the proposed



priority, and open-ended questions. Respondents shared additional requests including, but not limited to, a call for reparations, lowering the cost of living, ensuring students with Individualized Education Plans receive their services on time, and increase childcare supports. Over 80 percent of community members agreed with 13 of the draft community equity priorities and 68 to 78 percent agreed with three draft community equity priorities. CORE worked with the Institute for State and Local Governance to analyze 4,212 Likert scale responses and 1,500 open ended responses.

To support the developing racial equity plan, CORE led briefings on what we heard from community. Two internal briefings were conducted for racial equity planners representing city agencies responsible for drafting plans. We held two public virtual share outs for interested members of the public, which was also opened for government staff. For more information on our virtual share out, please see our recorded session available for the public via our YouTube page @CommissionOnRacialEquity. Following our briefings, CORE drafted updated CEP language for the Commissioners to workshop with the public prior to finalizing.

In addition to 4,212 responses, CORE produced 16 draft community equity priority data profiles to provide a baseline understanding of each priority using publicly available data. We have begun assembling existing data and data that offers insights into the historical and current inequities. Profiles can be found on our website, [www.nyc.gov/core](http://www.nyc.gov/core). The information provided was used by CORE's Commissioners to make final edits to the language and vote to approve 18 community equity priorities on November 20, 2024. The Commissioners' vote on the final community equity priorities can be found on our YouTube page @CommissionOnRacialEquity. Community feedback on the draft priorities is also outlined in the summary sheet which is available on CORE website.

**I would like to now provide an overview of the challenges we have faced in the 2024 Racial Equity Planning Process.**

Despite CORE's success, we faced significant challenges working to fulfill the NYC Charter mandate. We did not have sufficient staff to support robust outreach throughout New York City or conduct a more thorough analysis of existing publicly available data pertaining to the Community Equity Priorities. By June 2024, CORE had grown to a staff of six, with each area of work managed by one staff member. CORE's success can be attributed to the dedication of its staff who are not only committed public servants, but who continue to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to the fight for racial equity and social justice for all.

CORE was intentional in its decision to only use publicly available data to ensure transparency to all communities. Unfortunately, we experienced significant challenges due to limited data accessibility, and insufficient data disaggregation within publicly available data sets. Publicly available data allowed us to see how limited our data is in its representation and acknowledgment

of communities harmed by racism and social injustice. Much of the publicly available data is outdated, not disaggregated, and inadequate for a thorough analysis through a racial equity lens. Given our city's diverse population—various races, genders, gender identities, and ages – our research must reflect that diversity.

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These challenges are rooted in structural racism and must be addressed to truly advance racial equity and meet the needs of voters who overwhelmingly called for these changes. Our city pays lip service to its diversity, but that diversity is not reflected in the data used to make decisions on policy, laws, and budgets that impact communities daily.

**In closing, I would like to refocus today's conversation on our north star and the necessary steps for the Fiscal Year 2026 budgeting process.**

Economic stability for all New Yorkers requires that government is accountable for their actions, whether it is to explain delays in their work, changes in funding allocation to neighborhoods or communities, or transparency in the day-to-day work of government staff such as child welfare, homeless services, health services, or police officers.

The north star of the Racial Equity Planning process as well as CORE'S mission is to structurally shift how our city institutions operate and invests in communities harmed by racism and social injustice. When the public voted for CORE, they envisioned structural changes that would stop the killing of Black people, and communities of color by law enforcement and those acting on behalf of law enforcement. Additionally, they were intentional about pursuing a new way of life that would allow them to thrive as opposed to just surviving. Charting a new way of life included the ability to afford food, housing, transportation and the ability to fully participate in community without having to live check by check.

Structural change requires a sincere effort, political will, and significant investments, all imperatives that were made explicit by the Racial Justice Commission when it introduced the city's racial equity planning timeline. Noting the importance of budgeting and resource prioritization to the racial justice process, the Commission unambiguously expressed its intent for the racial equity plan to intersect with the city's budget process and prefaced the timeline with a clear directive for the city's executive branch to "develop racial equity plans simultaneously with its development of the citywide budget, before the budget is submitted to the City Council." In departing from this aim, the city risks undermining its capacity to ensure that all New Yorkers enjoy the opportunity to thrive.

Finally, structural change requires accountability, and over 80 percent of the New Yorkers CORE engaged, agreed that holding city employees and their agencies, including police and social service workers, responsible for any harm and abuse of power is a priority for advancing racial equity in our city. Therefore, I would like to bring to your attention the recent ruling dated February 12, 2025, by NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Trials, Rosemarie Maldonado, stating that Lieutenant Jonathon Rivera should be terminated from his position for the murder of Allan Feliz that took place on October 17, 2019. I hope that the family of Allen Feliz can count on you, Chair,



and this committee to ensure that this recommendation is upheld without interference and the Feliz family receives justice.

**NYC 2024 Community Equity Priorities**

<b>Our government justly values all talents and contributions</b>
<b>NYC communities call on their government to prioritize and measure the following:</b>
1. Remove the gaps in race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and disability in city jobs. Ensure that government work and staff reflect the city's commitment to equity and social justice.
2. Fund communities harmed by racism and injustice to shape and get updates on NYC government plans.
3. Remove the gaps in race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and disability in city pay, promotions, and contracts.
4. Ensure NYC offices and partners get funds for community-based language access services in the city's most spoken languages.
5. Check for and remove any formulas and computer processes that may be biased based on race, ethnicity, or poverty. This will prevent inequities in health care, housing, policing, criminal justice, employment, social service and more.
6. Collect, analyze, and share data on access to government services with the public, categorizing it by specific groups harmed by racism and social injustice.
<b>Our government ensures the condition of thriving for every person</b>
<b>NYC communities call on their government to prioritize and measure the following:</b>
7. Expand access to safe, stable housing for those at risk of homelessness, eviction, and deed theft without delay. Access should be available to individuals and families.
8. Evaluate and remove fines and fees to reduce the impact on low-income people of all ages.
9. Use and expand non-punitive responses to mental health and all crises. These responses should rely less on police where possible. People should be allowed to decide or contribute to decisions about their own care.
10. Reduce racial and economic segregation and education gap by increasing support to schools. Help every student and family with education and other health related social needs.
11. Expand health, mental health, substance use, and disability services. They must meet the needs of families and individuals harmed by racism and social injustice.
12. Remove costs and barriers to CUNY enrollment and retention.
13. Increase access and lower the cost to basic needs such as quality food, transportation, medical, and housing
<b>Our government embraces vigilance, remedy, and reconstruction</b>
<b>NYC communities call on their government to prioritize and measure the following:</b>

14. Expand access for those harmed by racial and social injustice to inform local emergency planning. These include plans to prepare for, act in, and recover from emergencies.
15. Remove barriers and increase access for people harmed by racial and social injustice to learn about buy and keep ownership of property.
16. Ensure all city employees and their agencies, including the police and social service providers, are held accountable for any harm and abuse of power.
17. Remove the gaps in racial, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and disability access to job training and funds to start businesses.
18. Expand services to prevent, intervene, and provide care for people and families harmed by policing, jails, and court supervision.



**Testimony from NYC Chief Equity Officer and Mayor’s Office of Equity  
and Racial Justice Commissioner Sideya Sherman**

***The State of Black New York and the Racial Equity Planning Process*  
Committee on Civil and Human Rights | Thursday, February 20, 2025 – 10:00AM**

Chair Williams, members of the Committees on Civil and Human Rights, distinguished members of the City Council, and the public: Good morning. I am Sideya Sherman, New York City's Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice (MOERJ). Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss the State of Black New York and provide an update on the citywide racial equity planning process.

As we near the conclusion of Black History Month, it's a fitting moment to reflect on the remarkable progress made by Black people in our nation and city. Black history is American history. The Black communities' centuries-long struggle for freedom and opportunity is fundamental to our country's evolution -- steadily guiding us toward realizing our democratic ideals. I am honored to serve as NYC's First Chief Equity Officer, carrying forward the legacy of those who came before me to ensure that our city is a place of opportunity and access for all.

Since our last update to the Council in June 2024, our team has been hard at work advancing the NYC Racial Justice Charter amendments. These historic measures, now embedded in our city charter, give us a clear mission: transform government systems and structures to foster racial equity and justice across New York City.

Since launching our office in late 2023, we have worked to stand up our operations while spearheading the citywide racial equity planning process and other crucial work. This work is of the utmost importance to us, and we have dedicated the past year to rallying city government behind it and engaging the Administration at all levels. Our efforts are unprecedented in scale and ambition. To meet the moment, our team has worked hand-in-hand with over 40 city agencies and 250 staff, conducting full-day training sessions, providing one-on-one technical assistance sessions, and offering ongoing guidance to help agencies develop, refine, and complete preliminary racial equity plans. This measurable plan, which is in its final stages, is designed to drive change across four key areas: budget, programs and policy, contracting, and personnel. By aligning these areas with our unwavering commitment to racial equity, we are setting the stage for transformative, long-lasting change. As we prepare to issue the preliminary citywide racial equity plan in the coming days, we look forward to feedback from the Council, our colleagues at the Commission on Racial Equity, and the public.

While we advance our forward-looking racial equity planning efforts, we also remain focused on developing programs and initiatives that meet the needs of New Yorkers today. Black New Yorkers have made great strides in our city, but we continue to confront health, economic, and other inequities that can limit opportunities for advancement. Through our NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI) and NYC Her Future (NHF) offices, we are laser-focused on addressing these issues with innovative programs for young people across our city.

YMI has long prioritized educational attainment, launching successful programs such as NYC Men's Teach, the CUNY Fatherhood Academy, and NEON Works, which provide education, career training, and credentialing to young people, ranging from those who are the most disconnected from school and work to those completing college and pursuing advanced degrees. YMI also has emphasized literacy, understanding that not only do we want our students to graduate, but we want to ensure they have the literacy skills they need to succeed. Through initiatives like Sound Partners, QuickReads, and Raising Readers, we collaborate with over 42 schools to support literacy through family-focused programming, yielding positive results in enhancing students' abilities to decode words and read more accurately.

NYC Her Future, our new companion office to YMI, has made swift progress since its inception last spring, engaging young people through community-based events, developing new training and career exploration programs, and rolling out targeted initiatives like our doula training program, which directly contributes to our city's effort to address the crucial issue of Black maternal health. Last year, we proudly partnered with the NYU McSilver Institute to co-host a legislative breakfast on this topic -- convening New York City and State elected officials alongside leaders in academia, healthcare, and maternal health advocates to identify root causes and collaboratively pursue solutions. We thank the Council for their partnership in addressing this vital issue.

The persistent racial wealth gap continues to hinder the progress of Black New Yorkers. Addressing this issue requires access to quality jobs, financial stability, and the asset accumulation necessary for true economic security. From day one, this Administration has been focused on affordability, prioritizing affordable housing, jobs, and putting money back in the pockets of New Yorkers. We are particularly proud of our partnership with NYC Kids Rise and NYC Public Schools on the citywide expansion of the Save for College program. Right now, over 280,000 students have NYC Scholarship accounts with \$42 million invested towards their higher education or career training goals. What's most exciting about this effort is that our city now has the infrastructure to invest collectively – government, private sector, and community – in the future of our students. Our office is also focused on advancing place-based strategies, recently partnering with NYCHA to invest in a series of programs that support entrepreneurship, career training, and asset-building for Bronx-based public housing residents.

We are committed to continuing to expanding our programmatic efforts, but we acknowledge that programming alone cannot address systemic inequities. This is why our work on the citywide racial equity plan and other structural reform efforts remains central to our mission. As we advance the Racial Justice Charter amendments, we are also collaborating with our colleagues across the government to implement new anti-racism training requirements. Additionally, we are proud to support implementation of the recently passed Local 92, which calls for the city to study reparations and the legacy of slavery. I want to commend you, Chair Williams, and the Council for your leadership in advancing this groundbreaking work through last year's "Juneteenth Legislative Package." We look forward to staying engaged with the Committee as this work progresses.

Thank you again for your commitment to creating a fair, just, and equitable city. We share your vision and dedication to building a future where all New Yorkers can thrive. We welcome any questions you may have.



**JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS**

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**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
FEBRUARY 20, 2025**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you Chair Williams and members of the Committee on Civil and Human Rights for holding this hearing, and allowing me the opportunity to provide a statement. I also want to say Happy Black History Month, no matter what acting NYC Mayor Donald Trump has to say about it! The past few weeks have been overwhelming with a news cycle bringing constant and conflicting changes to our federal government's policies. More than ever before, it is important that we listen to those who testify today and uplift Black New Yorkers.

For nearly five years, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and exposed the racial inequities that have continued to impact New York City. While all New Yorkers have been impacted, data shows that Black New Yorkers have been hit the hardest socially, economically, and when it comes to the state of their health. This systematic marginalization because of the color of their skin cuts across all areas of life. At a time when they are feeling particularly vulnerable we need to hear from our administration about plans to address racial equity viewed through a citywide lens.

James Baldwin, one of our greatest New Yorkers, once said "Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor." It's this cost and continued lack of investment that has put our Black communities in peril. They suffer disproportionately from skyrocketing rent, predatory landlords, and increasing evictions. As the cost of basic necessities and rent rapidly increase we can expect even more New Yorkers facing eviction. In the past two decades, the city's Black population has decreased by almost 200,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Among Black children and teenagers living in the city, the number declined by 19% from 2010 to 2020.<sup>2</sup> Black families are not leaving because of congestion pricing, but rather they can not keep up with the cost of what it takes to find decent housing in the city.

In light of what's happening in Washington DC with the Orange Menace's executive orders, we should focus on what we can do here in New York City, and hold the mayor accountable to the needs of our neighbors. CUNY is an economic driver for New Yorkers and the Adams administration needs to push for full funding. To ensure students are safe and able to learn, I look forward to seeing the adoption of Restorative Justice Healing Centers at all CUNY schools. Another economic driver of our city is 3k and access to affordable local childcare. New York City needs to see a dramatic improvement in the timeline

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/nyregion/black-residents-nyc.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



**JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS**

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to pay contracts, especially to small daycare centers and other small businesses struggling to stay open because of unreasonable wait on payment for services rendered.

In terms of housing, deed theft poses one of the most significant risks to Black homeownership in New York City. I introduced Int 0067-2024 which would require the Department of Finance, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to conduct education and outreach regarding deed fraud and foreclosure prevention assistance fraud. CM Hudson has introduced Int 0888-2024 which would require disclosures of market value for unsolicited offers to purchase residential properties. CM Riley's legislation Int 0901-2024 would require the office of financial empowerment to provide assistance to homeowners. Both of which would prevent predatory practices that push people out of their homes, and exacerbate gentrification, and destabilize communities.

The same way we work to keep these Black families in their homes, we must ensure access to housing for those who are overrepresented in our legal system. Studies show that Justice Involved Supporting Housing (JISH) gives people a better shot at not having interactions with the system.<sup>3</sup> The patterns in the city show Black youth crying out for viable support and programming. One of the most successful approaches to keep these young people from getting into trouble is to give them something to do. Fully funded year round employment opportunities would help Black families avoid the Hunger Games for a select few spots in the summer.

When we talk about health care outcomes, one of the strongest examples of racial disparity is in maternal health outcomes. As we've seen just this month, racial gaps widened. Black women in the U.S. died at a rate nearly 3.5 times higher white women around the time of childbirth in 2023.<sup>4</sup> In 2022 I was happy to pass legislation as part of a package of maternal health bills. With the Council, we were ensuring that these rights are upheld and New Yorkers are empowered to demand what they deserve. Making sure that public hospitals are funded with contracts that ensure quality doctors serve patients who are predominantly people of color can help address this continued shameful gap that costs the lives of black women.

I expect the administration to make clear what their plan is moving forward since they are already behind on schedule for these NYC Preliminary Citywide Racial Equity Plan. I hope during today's hearing we can work together to create a more equitable and just city for Black New Yorkers.

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.csh.org/2023/10/fuse-10-year-follow-up-report-executive-summary/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/racial-gap-widens-in-maternal-mortality-around-time-of-childbirth>

## **Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee On Civil & Human Rights - Oversight Hearing, The State of Black New York and The Racial Equity Planning Process**

February 20, 2025

The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) thanks Chair Williams and the members of the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on this crucial topic.

### **About the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development**

ANHD is one of New York City's lead policy, advocacy, and technical assistance and capacity-building organizations. We maintain a membership of 80+ neighborhood-based and citywide nonprofit organizations that have affordable housing and/or equitable economic development as a central component of their mission. We are an essential voice, bridging the power and impact of our member groups to build community power and ensure the right to affordable housing and thriving, equitable neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. We value justice, equity and opportunity, and we believe in the importance of movement building that centers marginalized communities in our work. Across 5 decades and 5 boroughs we have consistently focused on addressing New York's housing affordability crisis, displacement, and economic inequity to build community power.

ANHD's work directly supports the needs of our members who develop, manage, and organize to preserve affordable housing, and who fight to bring equity into low-wealth communities in New York City—especially communities of color. Our groups rely on us for technical assistance and capacity-building resources that allow them to maximize their resources, skills and impact. The support services, research, analysis, public education, and coalition building we do helps to identify patterns of local neighborhood experiences and uplift citywide priorities and needs. Our work translates into the capacity to win new programs, policies and systems that ensure the creation and preservation of deeply and permanently affordable housing, and economic justice.

### **Disparate Impact of the Housing Affordability Crisis**

New York's affordable housing crisis continues to escalate, leaving hundreds of thousands of residents struggling to keep up with rising rents and facing the threat of displacement. In early 2024, homelessness saw a sharp rise<sup>1</sup>, reflecting the growing instability among low-income households. More than half of all NYC households are rent burdened, while about one in five devote more than half of their earnings to rent.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are far worse for the lowest income New Yorkers - fully 80% of NYC households categorized as Very Low or Extremely Low

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<https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/01/dinapoli-numbers-homeless-population-doubled-new-york>

<sup>2</sup> <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/spotlight-new-york-citys-rental-housing-market/>

Income are rent burdened.<sup>3</sup> This crisis has left many New Yorkers vulnerable, with escalating housing costs pushing families to the brink, and fueling increasing homelessness - even as the number of asylum seekers coming to New York has slowed.

Black New Yorkers are disproportionately impacted by this crisis due to a continued stark racial wealth gap, income gap, and discrimination.

- Black households in New York State are three times as likely to face eviction as White households.<sup>4</sup>
- New York City's Black renters are twice as likely as White renters to have no money at all in savings.<sup>5</sup>
- In New York City, the Black homeownership rate is only 33%, with only 9% owning their homes free and clear, compared to a White homeownership rate of 47%, with 19% owning their homes free and clear.<sup>6</sup>

## **A Need for Systemic Change**

Though the need for reform stretches across all our institutions, those that decide on our built-environment play an especially crucial role. Our city's planning & development processes are failing us. Our current system for making land-use, budgeting, and policy decisions perpetuates a landscape of inequitable development and investment that fuels displacement on the one hand and exclusion on the other. Low-income communities of color suffering the effects of decades of disinvestment are pushed to accept destructive rezonings in order to have their existing needs addressed, while whiter and wealthier communities are largely exempted from doing their part to address citywide needs and frequently block affordable housing and shelters.

If racial equity is truly a priority for our city then a cultural shift in planning is needed, to address a stubborn developer-centric approach that privileges capital over community. At the heart of this culture shift is rebuilding trust with New Yorkers that have been hardest hit not only by COVID-19 but by decades of disinvestment and cycles of speculation. The City cannot simply repackage their current approach of rezoning low-income communities of color in the name of equity. At this crucial moment in our city and country, we need to do better.

This means first and foremost moving away from the Department of City Planning's intentionally "race-blind" approach to planning and zoning. By failing to center racial equity in the planning process, or even acknowledge in any official fashion the role it plays, DCP continues to advance planning decisions that primarily benefit whiter and wealthier communities. Applying the same tool in a colorblind fashion across neighborhoods does not produce the same results across neighborhoods.

## **Recommendations**

- **Prioritize Deep Affordability**  
The City should prioritize investment in the preservation and development of deeply affordable housing, which directly serves those New Yorkers who are by far most likely to be homeless or facing eviction.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://anhd.org/report/2024-ami-cheat-sheet>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/racial-justice-right-to-remain-good-cause-eviction>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/racial-justice-right-to-remain-good-cause-eviction>

<sup>6</sup> <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/the-racial-wealth-gap-in-new-york/>

- **Prevent Discrimination**  
The City should strengthen policy and increase funding for enforcement to prevent racial and source of income discrimination. Despite laws on the books, discrimination remains a commonplace occurrence for both renters and homebuyers. It disproportionately impacts Black New Yorkers, and represents a clear impediment to housing access and stability.
- **Prevent Evictions**  
The City should fully fund Right to Counsel, which has proven highly effective at preventing evictions. We know that tenants with a Right to Counsel attorney are highly likely to be able to stay in their homes, but due to lack of funding, many tenants who qualify for an attorney under the Right to Counsel law are still facing eviction proceedings in housing court on their own.
- **Expand Voucher Access**  
The City must fully implement the CityFheps changes passed into law by City Council in 2023, and increase funding to enable more voucher availability. The Council passed this legislation in order to expand access to the CityFheps program, and remove unnecessary and counterproductive requirements. There is no excuse for the administration's continued foot-dragging and outright refusal to implement these laws.
- **Stabilize Community-Based Organizations**  
The City should do more to ensure the stability and sustainability of frontline non-profits that serve marginalized communities, with timely registration and payment of contracts and increased funding for programs and services. Especially now, as many of our frontline community organizations are threatened by loss of federal funding, the City must step up to make sure that the organizations on which our residents depend are able to continue providing essential services.
- **Implement Comprehensive Planning**  
New York City needs a comprehensive planning process to better evaluate and respond to the needs of residents, mitigate anticipated risks associated with a changing city and climate, eliminate racial and economic disparities, and make coordinated, consistent decisions with transparency and accountability. At its core, comprehensive planning would bring an equity framework to the city's planning process, and increase community participation in the decisions that impact our neighborhoods.
- **Ensure Budget Equity**  
The City should require agencies to analyze, track, and disclose local needs for both City infrastructure and services, and to make budgeting decisions that are specifically intended to address the greatest needs and reduce inequity across neighborhoods. We must ensure that the investment and infrastructure needs of low-income communities and neighborhoods that have historically suffered from disinvestment are addressed and prevent needed investment from being used as a bargaining chip to get communities or politicians to agree to rezonings that do not serve them and that they do not want.
- **Use Public Land for Public Good**



The City must use its public resources, and particularly public land, in ways that maximize public benefit and reduce rather than reinforce racial inequality and segregation. By requiring that Request For Proposals (RFPs) and the transferring or leasing of City-owned land go to non-profit, community-based organizations, including community land trusts, the City can ensure that these public resources benefit communities with the most need. Historically, the City has favored for-profit developers and market-rate development on public land, which has served to exacerbate racial inequality by pushing out BIPOC residents and taking profits generated from these transactions out of communities and into developers' pockets. In contrast, mission-driven non-profit developers and community land trusts are best positioned to use public land for the development of 100% permanently affordable and deeply affordable housing that is responsive to and directly serves low-income, BIPOC New Yorkers and helps undue racial segregation and the racial wealth gap.

Thank you again for considering our testimony. If you have any questions or for more information, please contact Emily Goldstein, Director of Organizing & Advocacy at [emily.g@anhd.org](mailto:emily.g@anhd.org).

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## Joint Testimony on "The State of Black New York"

February 23, 2025

To the Committee on Civil and Human Rights:

**The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1978. We are part of the Independent Living Centers movement, a national network of grassroots and community-based organizations that enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to direct their own lives. CIDNY is the voice of people with disabilities in the five boroughs of New York City. We hereby testify on behalf of our consumers on the "State of Black New York."

### **Education:**

Below are a few examples of the interconnected barriers that contribute to NYC public school students with disabilities being twice as likely to drop out of high school as their nondisabled peers (10.7% vs 4.7%, according to a 2021 National Center for Education Statistics report). And, while all students with disabilities feel the impact of these issues, students from low-income families and students of color often feel a disproportional negative impact.

- Curricula and physical school buildings can be inaccessible;
- A backlog in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) has resulted in some students having to wait years to receive legally mandated accommodations and related services (a 2023 report from the Office of the New York City Comptroller found that during the 2021-2022 school year 13,800 related services- e.g., speech therapy, physical therapy, etc.- were not fulfilled); and
- Staffing shortages of paraprofessionals, guidance counselors, and social workers limit access to mental health services. Certain clubs and programs that require the presence of an additional professional (the national guidance says the ratio for both guidance counselors and social workers should be 1:250, or 1:50 if the students present with higher needs; the average in NYC public schools is one social worker for every 456 students and one guidance counselor for every 277 students).

Addressing the impact of intersectional identities, particularly for Black students, is critical when it comes to addressing these issues, beginning with the need to reduce the diagnostic equity gap. When an assessment for learning disabilities is not available through their children's schools, some families turn to private, often expensive, assessments. Students from low-income families might not have that option; therefore they will not receive official diagnoses, nor be eligible for support. This particularly impacts low-income students of color, who, because their frustration in school is often deemed an indication of "emotional or behavioral disturbance,"

instead of an indication of an unaddressed learning disability that could be ameliorated with supportive services in schools. There is all the more reason for their public schools to pursue formal and professional assessments for these students. This is just one example of the inextricable link between education equity and education access.

### **Employment:**

In NYC, 12.4% of people who identify as female have a disability (compared to 10.1% of people who identify as male), and of the almost 986,000 New Yorkers who have a disability, roughly 69% are people of color. The impact of this intersectionality, particularly on employment, remains largely unstudied, and, by extension, unaddressed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides statistics on employment as it relates to disability status, gender, and race, but it does not provide statistics on the intersection of all three. But this is critical when examining the nature of pay disparity, since, according to the American Community Survey, people with disabilities in NYS are almost twice as likely as people without disabilities to live below the poverty line (30% vs 17%).

While they are not the only contributing factors to the likelihood of people with disabilities experiencing poverty, occupational segregation and pay disparity play a major role in it. According to the BLS, people with disabilities are less likely to work in traditionally higher paid managerial or professional positions than people without disabilities (37.4% compared to 43.9% respectively). People with disabilities can experience disproportionate difficulty obtaining and retaining well-paying jobs, partly for the same reasons that people of color, women, and especially women of color do: many of the practices involved in applying, hiring, and training for jobs and subsequent promotions are implicitly discriminatory.

As it relates to disability, employees who request accommodations they are legally entitled to can be met with discouragement and even hostility in the workplace, often leaving those employees with the difficult decision of either struggling to work without necessary resources and supports or enduring further marginalization by soliciting them. Both choices can lead to employees being overlooked for promotions, or to them leaving their jobs entirely. The NYC Council released a report in 2024 that reflects the compounding effects the intersection of racial and gender bias have on wage parity. It is critical to recognize that disability bias compounds them further.

### **Transportation:**

CIDNY is a strong advocate for accessible, equitable transportation for people with disabilities. New Yorkers with disabilities, particularly Black New Yorkers, continue to face significant barriers that limit individual mobility and also contribute to broader systemic inequities. The inaccessibility of public transit disproportionately impacts Black and low-income communities. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, Black workers are more likely than white

workers to rely on public transit, with 34% of Black commuters in major U.S. cities using buses or trains compared to 14% of white commuters. Additionally, transit deserts—areas with limited or no access to reliable public transportation—are more prevalent in low-income neighborhoods, where Black residents are overrepresented. We urge the Council to prioritize funding to improve public transit accessibility, ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in economic and civic life. Additionally, we strongly support the expansion of the Fair Fares program to cover individuals up to 200% of the federal poverty level. Many low-income New Yorkers with disabilities, including a significant number of Black residents, struggle to afford transit costs. In 2023, 21.7% of Black New Yorkers lived in poverty, nearly double the rate of White residents (11.5%). Expanding Fair Fares would be a crucial step toward addressing these disparities and ensuring equitable access to public transportation.

### **Health:**

Many Black people face mental and physical health issues that are due to their residential environment. People living in the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn are reportedly facing health issues associated with addiction and depression. Substance use and overdoses disproportionately affect Black and Latino communities. According to American Addiction Centers, some addicts may never seek help to recover as the healthcare system is expensive and they are afraid of having medical debt.

Also, many Black people have limited access to healthcare providers that meet their needs. For example, Black women are reportedly facing a 40% higher death rate from breast cancer compared to White women. This disparity is due to the lack of diagnoses at a young age and lack of effective treatment. (<https://www.bcrf.org/about-breast-cancer/black-women-breast-cancer-disparities/>).

### **Housing:**

Black New Yorkers are facing a huge lack of affordable and accessible housing. Landlords are charging three months (first month rent, last month rent, and broker fees) to rent a new apartment. And landlords may terminate applications when prospective tenants disclose disabilities.

We advocate for a fair and just proceeding of housing applications to combat the discrimination that people may encounter when their disabilities are disclosed. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation and modifications when needed. Denying such accommodations can be classified as “ableist.”

In addition, some landlords increase the rent every year in a way that is not compliant with the NYC rent guidelines (2.75% yearly or 5.25% every two years). Tenants may fear losing their apartments when denouncing rent gouging or lack of accessibility.

**Voting:**

Voting access remains another critical civil rights issue. CIDNY conducts poll site accessibility surveys and works directly with voters with disabilities to ensure they can cast their ballots independently and privately. Black New Yorkers with disabilities face higher rates of inaccessible polling places, inadequate voter education, and other systemic barriers that suppress their political voices, due to longstanding racial and disability-related disparities in election accessibility. These barriers disproportionately affect them compared to white voters and non-disabled voters. We call on the City to increase investment in accessible voting technology, expand language access for disabled voters of color, and enforce existing protections under the ADA and Help America Vote Act. New York City must take proactive steps to remove these obstacles and uphold the fundamental right to vote for all residents.

We thank the Council for their time and effort in considering these issues.

Sincerely,

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in favor     in opposition

Date: 2/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sideya Sherman, NYC Chief Equity &

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ MOERS

I represent: MOERS Commissioner

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Jimmy Pan

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Racial Justice Commission

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Linda Tigan

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I represent: NYC CORE

Address: 233 Broadway

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