

TESTIMONY

**Before the Council of the City of New York
Committee on Children and Youth
Hearing**

**Oversight: Evaluation of DYCD's Beacon and
Cornerstone Programs**

Presented by

Associate Commissioner Wanda Ascherl

June 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, and members of the Children and Youth Committee. I am Wanda Ascherl, Associate Commissioner at the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by Thresia Harris, Assistant Commissioner for Community Centers. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss DYCD's Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers.

DYCD's community centers include 92 Beacon programs located in public schools across New York City and 100 Cornerstone programs operating in New York City Housing Authority developments. They operate year-round in non-school hours on weekdays, weekends and in the summer. Each center transforms its host location into a resource for the whole community by offering an integrated range of programming tailored to local needs. For all participants, especially youth, community centers offer a safe place to engage in recreational activities, discover new interests, acquire skills, and find opportunities to contribute to the community, guided and supported by program staff. Centers provide activities and services for school-age youth, families, and adults ages 22 years and older, including seniors. In keeping with the original concept, programs make special efforts to engage hard-to-recruit youth and young adults for whom participation in activities that foster positive youth development, social emotional learning (SEL) and leadership skills are especially beneficial.

DYCD Community Centers have a broad reach. In Fiscal Year 2025, Beacon programs served more than 62,000 youth and 17,000 adults. Cornerstone programs range in size from smaller centers to large multi-purpose community spaces. In Fiscal Year 2025, Cornerstone Community Centers served over 21,000 young people and 6,700 adults.

DYCD monitors program performance and provides technical assistance to help programs reach their contract and community goals. DYCD Program Managers make periodic on-site visits to programs to ensure that sites are welcoming, properly staffed, engaging the community, and operating at full capacity. DYCD Program Managers also monitor whether enrollment and attendance are consistent with contracted levels and program goals. DYCD's Evaluation and Monitoring System in DYCD Connect documents detailed program evaluations in four key sections: Program Practice, Program Compliance, Administration, and Outcomes/outputs. If a program does not meet the established standards, DYCD may issue a Strategic Action Plan or a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) and provides onsite coaching and capacity building resources if there are issues or indicators that need serious and formal correction. This includes but is not limited to contract compliance, program quality and outcomes and safety violations.

Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers host specialized activities and participate in various citywide initiatives to support and enhance offerings to the community. These include:

Saturday Night Lights

The Saturday Night Lights sports program has enhanced community center programming by offering young people year-round, free sports and enrichment activities on Saturday evenings. The SNL program provides basketball, soccer, dance, and other sports and arts services in community centers, and schools, most of which are co-located with Beacon and Cornerstone programs. There are 141 SNL programs throughout the City of which 46 are located in a Beacon and 50 are located in Cornerstone Community Centers. In FY25, SNL programs served 4,424 participants.

Mental Health Supports

DYCD participated in a pilot initiative in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health to introduce new skills for program staff on mental health coping strategies they can use to work with young people. In partnership with the New School Center for Global Mental Health (CGMH), DYCD facilitated the first adaptation and implementation of Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE) in the U.S. The intervention was specifically developed to provide a scalable, culturally adaptable, and preventive model of care for youth experiencing symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression, and other forms of psychological distress. The EASE initiative focused on Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers by training center staff to support children in identifying and understanding their emotions, building on their strengths, and practicing a host of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. EASE also supported caregivers in practicing active listening, positive discipline, spending quality time with their children, and practicing self-care.

My NY Story

My New York Story is an intergenerational storytelling initiative developed in partnership with the NYC Department for the Aging that brings together older adults and young people to build meaningful relationships through shared experiences, dialogue, and creative expression. Over the course of a six-week program, participants engaged in guided storytelling workshops that encouraged them to explore themes of identity, resilience, community, and belonging while learning from one another's lived experiences. The program culminated in a citywide celebration where youth and older adults showcased their stories and reflected on the connections they formed across generations.

In 2026, the program paired four DYCD Cornerstone sites with neighboring Older Adult Centers: **Eastchester Community Center**, **Cypress Hills Community Center**, **Pink Community Center**, and **Grand Street Settlement Roosevelt Community Center**. Through weekly workshops, participants strengthened intergenerational understanding, developed communication and leadership skills, and created a shared space where personal histories could

be preserved and celebrated. The culminating event highlighted the power of these connections and demonstrated how intergenerational programming can foster empathy, civic engagement, and stronger communities across New York City.

Step It Up 2026

Our annual Step It Up program was a huge success! Step It Up NYC is DYCD's premier youth performing arts and social impact initiative, empowering young people to use dance, storytelling, and creative expression as tools for advocacy and community change. More than a competition, Step It Up NYC challenges youth teams to develop original performances and accompanying social impact campaigns that address issues affecting their communities. On June 4, 2026, ten finalist teams representing DYCD-funded Beacon, Cornerstone, and COMPASS programs from across New York City took the stage at the historic United Palace before a crowd of 1,100 attendees, to raise awareness about critical topics including teen violence, domestic violence, incarceration, peer pressure, discrimination and cyberbullying. Through months of preparation, participants strengthened leadership, teamwork, public speaking, and civic engagement skills while amplifying youth voices on issues that matter most to them. The 2026 Step It Up Championship was awarded to 2 Beacon and 2 Cornerstone Community Centers.

DYCD and Community Center providers are preparing busily for summer programming, which will include summer camp, Summer Rising, and expanded summer programming hours in Cornerstone Community Centers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss DYCD's community centers. We look forward to answering your questions.



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

Oversight: Evaluation of DYCD's Beacon and Cornerstone Programs

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst
June 23, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kate Connolly, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH).

UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 840,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses have been community hubs for youth programming and community development for over a century, and ensure that community members have what they need to thrive. Settlement houses operate DYCD-funded programs in most neighborhoods of New York City. Collectively, they operate half of all Cornerstone programs and a third of all Beacon programs across the city.

The Beacon and Cornerstone models are unique in that they are community-centered models. Instead of being focused on a specific age group or activity, they provide a full spectrum of programming and resources for all community members - from elementary school-aged to adults. Providers use feedback from participants and community members to tailor their activities and partnerships, making every Beacon and Cornerstone program different and highly specific to their neighborhood.

Despite the longevity and popularity of these models, both programs are chronically underfunded and have not seen new Requests for Proposals in over ten years. **As DYCD and the City begin to think about the future of these programs, they must engage community members, staff, and families to hear directly about their needs and wants.** In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about the loneliness epidemic and the need for community spaces - often

called third spaces.¹ In February 2026, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement titled “Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents”² where they discussed the impact of digital ecosystems on young people and provided recommendations for different levels (families, pediatricians, government, etc.) on how to minimize the negative impacts. The top recommendation for policymakers was to “fund prosocial third spaces” such as “community centers that provide enrichment, social activities, and physical activity, can “crowd out” digital experiences.” Beyond the well-documented academic, economic, and mental health benefits of out-of-school-time programming, the AAP’s policy statement makes another case for further investments in community center programming by highlighting the pro-social benefits these programs have. With these existing community center programs, the City has an opportunity to address this larger need, while also providing tailored services for local neighborhoods.

This testimony will provide a brief overview of the history of these programs, as well as recommendations for how to strengthen NYC’s community centers.

Background on NYC’s Community Centers

Beacons are school-based, year-round community centers that serve community members from six-years-old through adulthood. Beginning in 1991, Beacons have 92 locations throughout the five boroughs of New York City operating in the afternoons and evenings, on weekends, and during school holidays and vacation periods, including the summer. Of the 92 Beacon contracts, UNH settlement house members hold 27 of those contracts. Using the host school as a hub, Beacons provide services from afterschool programming, arts and enrichment opportunities, ESOL classes, GED preparation classes, organized sports, and even more opportunities for community connection and recreation. Whereas typical school-based youth programming may have an emphasis on academic remediation, community-focused programming allows young people an intentional space to develop holistically within a supportive community in an assets-based program framework rather than within a deficit model that does not recognize the skills, knowledge, and multiple intelligences our young people already possess. In contrast to other school-based programs, Beacons also serve adult community members and create programming specific to their needs - allowing for intergenerational, whole-family programming.

Begun nearly two decades later in 2010, Cornerstone Community Centers are based in NYCHA housing developments throughout the city and play a unique and important role in communities by acting as essential community centers that provide engaging and high-quality programming for people of all ages. The work is rooted in community engagement and staff are experts in facilitating youth-lead and community-engaged events and activities. Cornerstones serve as community hubs, remaining open during evening and weekend hours to provide activities and resources to the community. This program was informed by the settlement house model and settlement houses operate approximately half of all Cornerstone sites.

¹ This idea has been explored in many articles, research papers, and books. The *Time* article “Why a ‘Third Life’ Is the Answer to America’s Loneliness Epidemic” gives a brief overview of why the decline of third spaces and social connection is concerning.

<https://time.com/7202834/third-life-america-loneliness-essay/>

² “Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents.” The American Academy of Pediatrics.

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/157/2/e2025075320/206129/Digital-Ecosystems-Children-and-Adolescents-Policy>. February 2026.

Community-centered programs like Beacons and Cornerstones allow community-based organizations (CBOs) to create programming centered around the needs and interests of the local community by serving both youth and adults. While all Beacons and Cornerstones include an afterschool component, the models are much more expansive than a COMPASS or SONYC program. As the City continues to work towards universal afterschool programming, they must consider expanding the Beacon and Cornerstone models as part of this plan to serve communities who would benefit from the extended services.

To support and strengthen Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers, the City must evaluate community wants and needs in conjunction with current Beacon and Cornerstone providers, and support sites in meeting these needs, through funding and partnerships.

Funding Challenges

Nonprofit staff do vital community-building work, but the Beacon and Cornerstone models themselves are under-funded, causing considerable stress and creating unnecessary challenges for the nonprofit staff who are tasked with their operation. Similar to COMPASS/SONYC programs prior to last year's RFP, Beacon and Cornerstone contracts have been renewed with stagnant funding for many years, leading to inadequate staff salaries and staffing patterns, making recruitment and retention of staff difficult. Additionally, with significant inflation since COVID-19, and exacerbated by global uncertainty over the past year, CBOs report that the costs of all supplies and vendors have increased beyond what they can keep up with.

The City must review the budgets for their community center programs - Cornerstones and Beacons - to evaluate how inflation and minimum wage increases over years of stagnant funding levels have impacted programs. In addition, in recent years, the City has extended program hours for community center programs and expanded their responsibilities. This has strained the capacity of program staff and forced some programs to scale back their offerings due to increased costs associated with staying open longer hours.

Beyond the need to increase program funding to better invest in quality staffing, current providers have expressed the need for additional funding to bring in vendors and sub-contractors to operate specialty programs. Providers expressed that adult participants rarely use the community centers as a casual meeting place, but often need the draw of a gym space or specialty programming, such as job readiness training or ESOL classes, regularly attend. With the costs for subcontractors or highly-qualified staff significantly higher than when these programs were started a decade or more ago, contract increases are necessary. With additional funding, program sites would be able to better attract the adult demographic, provide the services their communities want, and deepen their intergenerational opportunities. Beyond increased contract funding, the City could further support community centers by connecting providers with co-locators who can offer programming or services at no cost if space is provided.

It is imperative that the City invest in community-centered programming by increasing overall funding for Cornerstone and Beacon Community Centers.

Beyond the need for overall funding increases, Beacon Community Centers have called for the ability to pay for participant stipends through their program budgets. Most Beacon sites in the settlement house network operate Counselor-in-Training (CIT) or internship programs. Providers

express the importance of these programs for engaging older youth, and providing leadership and work skills programming. However, DYCD does not consistently allow participant stipends as an allowable budget expense. While some sites are able to find outside funding sources to support a robust program, other sites are forced to limit their CIT programs despite demand from the community. This is a missed opportunity as these programs are in line with the City's emphasis on youth workforce readiness and career exploration. **DYCD must make intern and Counselor-in-Training (CIT) stipends an allowable expense under program budgets.**

Mental Health Services

The mental health needs among youth have grown significantly over the past 10 years and, especially, since the COVID-19 pandemic. Just like schools, afterschool and community center programs are often faced with these needs, and may be in a prime position to connect young people and families with care. However, assessing mental health needs and accessing mental health supports are complicated and must be done with care and qualified staff.

When thinking about the future of community center programming, the City should evaluate the benefit of funding program sites to host social workers or crisis workers to provide on-site services and resources. These sites have already done the work to become welcoming and trusted spaces - enabling Beacons and Cornerstones to meet the needs of community members in crisis just makes sense. However, at current funding levels, it is nearly impossible to support the salary of a qualified mental health worker, leaving many current providers the only option of making referrals to external clinics. This could look like on-site services for organizations who might have the capacity and expertise to offer mental health services internally, or robust partnerships with external providers who can offer this work on site.

Additionally, rather than just relying on community center providers to provide or refer to mental health services, the City must work with DOHMH and community health providers to create true partnerships and co-locations to bring professional services to the community.

Infrastructure and Repair Needs

Cornerstone Community Centers face additional challenges stemming from failing NYCHA infrastructure. NYCHA developments have faced historical neglect and severe under-funding for the last half-century, leading to modern conditions of dilapidation and disrepair. Community centers are not exempt from these challenges, and providers struggle to get NYCHA or DYCD to respond quickly to repair needs within their centers, from leaks that could cause to mold; peeling paint that could lead to lead exposure; and HVAC issues that result in high temperatures when the AC shuts off in the summer months.

The issues created by failing infrastructure are exacerbated by band-aid solutions for serious structural problems, which lead to the need for larger repairs and long-term program relocations. Even providers operating in developments that have gone through RAD/PACT conversions find themselves without clear answers as to who is responsible for various repairs, licenses, or permits. Ultimately, delayed repairs can cause program disruptions, forcing families to scramble for alternative care when centers are closed for reasons outside of their control, and preventing communities from accessing important resources.

Beyond the physical impact on programming and space, delayed repairs also impact program budgets. Cornerstone providers shared that they have received violations and been fined by New York State Department of Health (DOH) and FDNY for issues they have already reported to DYCD and/or NYCHA. These violations are based on health and safety regulations to keep participants and staff safe. However, inspections by DOH and FDNY do not include communication with DYCD or NYCHA, including a review of open tickets from providers requesting facility repairs. This results in Cornerstone providers assuming responsibility for all violations and associated fines, even if they have been actively trying to solve the issue with city agencies.

Providers are not reimbursed or compensated by DYCD or NYCHA for paying these fines, so the costs come out of the Cornerstone program budgets. These community-based organizations want to support their communities, and yet years of Cornerstone contract extensions with no cost escalators have brought them to a point where budgets cannot absorb the added costs of violations due to crumbling NYCHA infrastructure. Requiring Cornerstone providers to cover the cost of violations issued by other city agencies for facility issues they are unable to resolve penalizes participants by co-opting funds that should be used for community programming. The City must commit to covering the costs of DOH and FDNY violation fines for Cornerstone Community Centers when providers have already communicated the issue to DYCD and/or NYCHA.

For providers who operate Cornerstones in developments that have gone through or are currently going through a RAD/PACT conversion, DYCD should develop a clear division of responsibility for repairs. Many providers have stated that while developers completed initial repairs to improve the space, the developers often push back against performing repairs post-construction, despite language in community agreements. DYCD should take a more active role in both the negotiation phase, and in ensuring developers are compliant with finalized agreements. Making sure that developers follow agreements with providers and complete repairs in a timely manner could ultimately save the City time and money.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at kconnolly@unhny.org.



Testimony of CAMBA Inc.

New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth

Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair

Oversight: Evaluation of DYCD's Beacon and Cornerstone Programs

Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Valerie Barton-Richardson, and I serve as President and CEO of CAMBA, Inc. and CAMBA Housing Ventures, Inc. Our mission is to help New Yorkers achieve stability and self-sufficiency through housing, education, workforce development, economic empowerment, family support, and community services.

CAMBA operates four Beacon programs and ten Cornerstone programs in Brooklyn. These programs are vital community anchors, and funding levels have remained largely stagnant despite significant increases in operating costs. Over the years, the City has expanded expectations for providers—including longer operating hours, summer safety initiatives, and additional programmatic responsibilities—while insurance premiums, maintenance costs, vendor contracts, and basic supplies have continued to rise. While we greatly appreciate the COLAs that the City has provided, it is increasingly difficult to retain a quality youth development workforce without an adequate investment in wages.

Beacon and Cornerstone programs are especially important because they are community-centered models that serve children, youth, adults, and families in ways that reflect local needs and priorities. For generations, settlement houses and community-based organizations have served as neighborhood hubs, and these programs remain among the City's most effective tools for supporting residents across age groups and communities. Cornerstone programs play a critical role within NYCHA developments and are deeply affected by the conditions of the facilities in which they operate.

At the same time, many of these Cornerstone Community Centers are located in aging NYCHA buildings facing serious infrastructure challenges. Providers routinely contend with leaks, mold, peeling paint, HVAC failures, inadequate air conditioning, and other facility deficiencies. Responsibility for addressing these issues is often unclear and may shift among nonprofit providers, NYCHA, DYCD, RAD/PACT developers, and property management companies. As a result, providers

are frequently left navigating a complicated system simply to determine who is responsible for repairs, maintenance, and compliance obligations.

Even when responsibility is clearly identified, repairs often take far too long. In the meantime, health and fire inspections continue, and providers may face violations or fines for conditions beyond their control. Program resources intended for direct services are diverted to address facility-related issues, reducing the quality and availability of programming. Rooms become unusable, services are disrupted, and children, youth, and families lose access to the very supports these centers are designed to provide.

RAD/PACT conversions have introduced additional challenges. Providers often struggle to ensure that promised work is completed after construction concludes, and accountability mechanisms for unresolved issues remain insufficient. Community-based organizations should not have to spend months organizing residents and stakeholders simply to secure basic repairs or fulfill existing commitments. The City must establish a clear, enforceable framework that ensures timely repairs, completion of obligations, and effective escalation procedures when problems persist.

To address these challenges, CAMBA respectfully urges the City to:

- Right-size Beacon and Cornerstone budgets immediately so funding reflects current economic realities, including inflation, labor costs, insurance expenses, and the true cost of operating high-quality programs.
- Establish clear policies and lines of accountability defining responsibility for repairs, maintenance, capital improvements, and compliance across NYCHA and RAD/PACT properties.
- Invest in Cornerstone infrastructure through dedicated capital funding to address major facility needs, deferred maintenance, and underlying building deficiencies.
- Create an expedited process for repairs, approvals, and corrective action when safety concerns, compliance issues, or program operations are affected.

Beacon and Cornerstone programs are not optional extras—they are essential community institutions that strengthen neighborhoods, support residents, and create opportunities for New Yorkers to thrive. If the City expects these programs to continue meeting growing community needs, it must provide the funding, facility support, and accountability structures necessary for their success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Valerie Barton- Richardson



Center for
Family Life
in Sunset Park

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair
June 23, 2026

Oversight: Evaluation of DYCD's Beacon and Cornerstone Programs

Good afternoon and thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Kristie Mancell, and I am a Division Director for School-based Programs for the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park.

I am here to speak about the critical role that DYCD Beacon and Cornerstone programs play in our communities, and about the need for the City to protect and adequately fund these models as true community-building programs.

I have been working in or overseeing Beacon Programs for the Center for Family Life since 2003. We operate 2 DYCD Beacon programs in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and believe they are vital resources to our neighborhood. Our Beacon Programs are anchors in the community, serving people across age groups and building trust over many years. Our Beacons are places where many people find belonging and connection with their community which combats isolation in these challenging times. Community members not only learn about and access resources from the Beacon staff; they also become resources for each other, strengthening the fabric of the neighborhood.

The Beacon model allows providers to create unique community spaces that are both reflective of and responsive to the communities we serve. They are welcoming spaces for new New Yorkers, long-time residents, young people, families, and older adults. They are not solely after-school programs. From ESL instruction and Know Your Rights workshops to soccer leagues, dance troupes, and family cooking classes, there is something for every member of the community. And if there isn't, there is flexibility to create, host, or partner with neighborhood groups to bring new programming to life as new needs emerge.

Our programs are being asked to meet real community needs while operating within funding structures that do not reflect the current cost of the work. Rates need to reflect what it actually takes to run high-quality, safe, responsive programs today. This means investing in the workforce that makes this work possible. The jobs are hard, with late nights and weekend hours, and programs are often asked to extend hours, pivot quickly, and respond to urgent community needs. Staff, the majority of whom are community members

and former participants in the Beacon themselves, rise to those requests, so the city must recognize what is being asked of these programs and invest resources to support them.

The city should also support the leadership pipeline within Beacons. Many participants volunteer their time as Counselors-in-Training or Youth Coaches because the program has been meaningful in their lives and they want to contribute to their community. That commitment is powerful, but they should not have to work for free. We should be able to provide stipends for interns and create paid career readiness pathways for young people who want to give back to their communities.

Finally, community voice must be central in any new Beacon design process. Families, participants, school partners, and neighborhood residents should have a real voice in describing the value of their Beacon and in shaping its future.

I urge the City Council and DYCD to protect the integrity of Beacons and Cornerstones, center community feedback, fund programs at rates that reflect the true cost of the work, and invest in the staff and leadership pipelines that make these programs successful.

Thank you for your time and for your attention to the needs of these vital community anchors.



**New York City Council Children and Youth Committee
Oversight Hearing on Beacon and Cornerstone
Testimony submitted by Sarah Jonas, Vice President of the Youth Division
June 23rd, 2026**

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Althea Stevens and the members of the Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Beacon and Cornerstone programs.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people, and no limits to their potential. By offering a continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part-time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. In addition to direct service delivery, we engage in policy and advocacy at all levels of government, with priorities informed by proven strategies that support children and families and the persistent barriers our staff confront while serving these communities every day.

As part of this work, Children's Aid holds more than 50 contracts with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), including one contract to operate a Beacon Community Center. We know that enriching and accessible youth and community programs are essential to a healthy city. For children and youth ages 5–18, high-quality afterschool, summer, and workforce development programs are foundational to academic success, social-emotional development, and safety. For working families, they help fill critical gaps during afterschool hours and the summer months, when consistent supervision and enrichment are most needed.

Center-based programs like Beacon and Cornerstone are a key part of this continuum because they operate longer hours, serve broader age groups, and function as true community hubs for both youth and families. However, despite strong community demand, these programs are often reimbursed at lower levels than other afterschool and summer initiatives, creating persistent and growing strain on providers.

Recognizing that the City has not released a new RFP for Beacon in nine years and for Cornerstone programs in over a decade, we're calling on the City to issue a new RFP that strengthens these programs and aligns them with current community needs and operational realities. A new RFP is a critical opportunity to correct long-standing funding and structural gaps and ensure that providers have the resources needed to deliver high-quality, stable, and responsive programming. At a high level, we believe the next RFP should:

1. Be developed through early and structured provider engagement to ensure program design and fiscal assumptions reflect on-the-ground realities
2. Establish reimbursement rates that reflect the true cost of operating extended-hour, multi-generational community centers

3. Expand the reach of programs to meet demonstrated community demand
4. Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to stabilize the workforce and sustain service delivery
5. Further invest in Adult and Family Support Services, like financial empowerment and food assistance
6. Align program expectations and requirements with the operational realities of center-based models

I. Children's Aid's Beacon

Children's Aid operates a Beacon program at our Charles Drew campus in the Bronx. This school-based community center serves approximately 600 children, youth, and adults annually. This program is far more than just an after-school program — it is a year-round, multi-generational community hub that families rely on well beyond school dismissal hours.

At our site, we operate until 10:00 PM on weekdays and from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM on weekends. During the summer, when demand for safe, structured programming increases, we extend operations until 11:00 PM, seven days per week.

Because our Beacon is embedded in the community, we regularly host a wide range of programming in partnership with city agencies and community-based organizations. At our site, we offer ESL classes, open gym opportunities, sports leagues including soccer and high school basketball, dance programming led by co-located partners, youth mentoring, arts and cultural programming such as drama, and workforce development workshops connected to the Summer Youth Employment Program. We also host large-scale community events in partnership with other local organizations, including anti-hate initiatives, health fairs, back-to-school events, and family engagement activities.

While all our programs are valued, we consistently see that sports-based programming has the highest enrollment and sustained engagement at our Beacon. Community open gym, soccer leagues, and our high school youth basketball program are among our most consistently well-attended offerings. We also see high participation in dance programming operated by co-located partners. For these programs, success is measured through DYCD attendance and participation data.

In addition, we provide critical supportive services driven by community need. At our Beacon, we offer adult employment services—including job readiness workshops, resume support, interview preparation, and career exploration—as well as digital literacy training to build essential workforce skills. We also provide financial empowerment programming focused on budgeting, savings, credit building, debt management, and long-term financial planning, supported by coaching and referrals that promote economic stability, including homeownership pathways. Food access is another core component of our model. Our Beacon operates a food pantry serving thousands annually, alongside nutrition education, cooking workshops, and expanded food distribution, which together provide critical support for families facing food insecurity.

II. Funding and Operational Challenges

While the Beacon model is deeply impactful in the surrounding community, our experience operating this program has made clear that current funding, staffing, and regulatory structures do not fully reflect the scale or complexity of the work required.

Funding Levels

Our current Beacon contract is valued at \$781,183 annually, including a base contract amount of \$603,501 and an additional \$176,906 for the Summer Safety Plan Initiative. Given that our Beacon serves more than 600 children, youth, and adults each year, this equates to roughly \$1,300 per participant served. While direct comparisons are imperfect—particularly because Beacon participants receive varying levels of engagement and services—this figure stands in stark contrast to the approximately \$6,800 per participant provided under new full-year COMPASS contracts. The disparity is particularly striking given that Beacons operate longer hours and provide a wider range of services than many traditional afterschool programs. Increasing base reimbursement rates for Beacon programs is necessary to ensure providers can sustain high-quality programming and meet the growing needs of the communities they serve.

Staffing Challenges

Staffing remains one of the most persistent challenges we face. At our Beacon, we operate evenings, weekends, and summers, which requires recruiting and retaining staff who can work nontraditional schedules. This is particularly challenging when considering that contract requirements classify many positions, including Assistant Directors, as part-time roles. Given the scale of operations and the need to provide consistent supervision across extended hours, these staffing structures do not always align with the realities of running a center-based program.

Facility Access and Conditions

Facility access and space constraints are an ongoing challenge for our Beacon program. Because we operate within a New York City Public School building, we share space with the school and other users. As a result, school-day activities, athletic programs, and other events often take priority, requiring us to modify, relocate, or occasionally cancel programming. While we value our partnership with the school community, these disruptions can create inconsistency for participants and families who rely on our services. Facility conditions can also affect program quality in ways outside of a provider's control. At our site, limited air conditioning in shared spaces such as gymnasiums and cafeterias creates challenges during the summer months, particularly given our extended hours of operation. Increased funding is needed to help address facility-related challenges and provide providers with the flexibility to adapt programming when space limitations or building conditions affect service delivery.

Security, Permits, and Operating Costs

Because our Beacon remains open late into the evening and on weekends, maintaining safe operations requires significant investment in security coverage. These costs can increase further when large community events are held, as providers may be required to obtain additional permits or security

coverage beyond the school safety personnel already present in the building. While these investments are essential to ensuring a safe environment for participants, staff, and community members, they are not always fully reflected in reimbursement structures.

Summer Rising Integration and Operational Strain

We also experience operational strain related to the integration of Summer Rising responsibilities into our Beacon model. At our site, summer programming requires staff to manage daytime Summer Rising programs while also maintaining evening Beacon programming. In practice, Beacon leadership is often responsible for overlapping program systems, schedules, and staffing structures during the summer months. This dual responsibility places significant administrative and staffing pressure on providers and is made even more challenging when Summer Rising programs are relocated, which we are experiencing this upcoming summer.

Enrollment Expectations and Community Demand

We have also observed that some program expectations do not always reflect current community realities. At our Beacon, we are expected to serve a broad range of participants across age groups, including at least 100 elementary school students. However, recruiting elementary-aged participants is particularly challenging because our campus serves middle and high school students, and many nearby elementary schools have launched their own afterschool programs since the pandemic. At the same time, we consistently exceed enrollment targets for middle school and high school youth. Meeting elementary enrollment targets requires significant outreach and additional staffing resources to maintain required supervision ratios. These trends suggest that enrollment expectations should be more flexible and responsive to the unique demographics and needs of each community, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model across Beacon sites.

Regulatory and SACC Licensing Challenges

Finally, we have experienced ongoing challenges related to School-Age Child Care (SACC) licensing requirements as they apply to Beacon programs. Because Beacons operate afterschool programming, providers must obtain a SACC license and comply with associated staffing requirements. This includes hiring program directors and staff who meet highly specific credentialing requirements, including prescribed coursework and credits in designated subject areas. While we support maintaining high standards for youth-serving professionals, these requirements can significantly narrow the pool of qualified candidates and make recruitment more challenging, particularly for leadership positions.

At our site, only a portion of a Beacon director's responsibilities involve programming that falls under SACC licensure. In practice, Beacon directors spend much of their time managing broader community programming, partnerships, evening and weekend operations, adult services, and other responsibilities that extend well beyond a traditional afterschool model. As a result, current credentialing requirements do not always align with the full scope of the role. We have also found that SACC oversight can create challenges for programs operating in NYCPS buildings. Because Beacons are located in school facilities that are maintained by NYCPS, providers may be cited for building-level conditions in shared spaces that are outside of their control.

Recognizing that summer programs in NYCPS buildings can function under a different regulatory structure, we encourage the City and State to explore whether similar flexibility could be applied to afterschool programming in school buildings while maintaining appropriate health and safety standards. Doing so could reduce duplicative oversight and better align regulatory requirements with the realities of operating school-based community centers.

III. Recommendations

Based on our experience operating a Beacon program in the Bronx, Children's Aid urges the Council to work with the Administration and DYCD to issue a new RFP for Beacon and Cornerstone that would address structural funding and operational challenges.

1. Ensure a New RFP is Designed with Early Provider Engagement

Engage providers early in the procurement process to ensure transparent, market-informed RFPs. This should include requiring a concept paper prior to RFP release to gather input on service gaps, program design, and fiscal feasibility, ensuring that programs are both workable in practice and responsive to community need.

2. Increase Reimbursement Rates for Center-Based Programs

A new RFP should include base reimbursement rates for center-based programs that reflect the true cost of delivering high-quality services, including extended operating hours, staffing requirements, security coverage, facility-related costs, and the full scope of community programming these sites provide.

3. Expand Access to Center-Based Programs

A new RFP should expand access to Beacon and Cornerstone programs by allowing for additional schools, centers, and community-based facilities to benefit from the model. Our experience shows that demand for safe, high-quality, extended-hour programming far exceeds current capacity in many neighborhoods across New York City.

4. Further Invest in Adult and Family Support Services

A new RFP should include further dedicated funding for the adult and family services that have become core components of Beacon and Cornerstone programs. At our Beacon, community members regularly access workforce development services, digital literacy training, financial empowerment programming, and food assistance alongside youth programming. These services are essential to supporting family economic stability and addressing immediate needs that directly impact a participant's ability to engage in longer-term educational and employment pathways. The next RFP should explicitly fund workforce development supports such as job readiness workshops, resume assistance, interview preparation, and employer partnerships, as well as financial empowerment programming including budgeting, savings, credit-building, debt management, and pathways to long-term financial stability. It should also provide sustained investment in food access initiatives, including food pantry operations, nutrition education, and food distribution efforts that many communities now rely on as a critical support.

5. Ensure New Contracts Include Annual COLAs

Include annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in all contracts to prevent the erosion of wages and operating budgets over time.

6. Align Requirements with the Reality of Community Center Operations

Align administrative requirements and performance expectations with the realities of operating community-based centers that function as multi-generational hubs, including evening, weekend, and summer operations that extend well beyond the traditional school day. Performance metrics and program expectations should also reflect the full range of services provided at Beacon and Cornerstone sites, including adult programming like financial empowerment programs.

7. Work with New York State to Modernize SACC Requirements for Community-Based Programs

Partner with New York State to review and modernize School-Age Child Care (SACC) requirements as they apply center-based programs operating in DOE school buildings. We recommend exploring regulatory flexibility or alternative compliance pathways that preserve child safety standards while better aligning oversight requirements with the realities of school-based, multi-service community centers.

IV. Closing

Our experience operating a Beacon program has shown both the extraordinary value of the model and the significant infrastructure required to sustain it. At our site, we see every day how these programs provide safety, opportunity, connection, and critical supports for children, youth, and families. We also see the operational pressures that arise when expectations and funding structures are not fully aligned.

Beacon and Cornerstone programs are among the City's most important investments in community well-being. With appropriate funding, staffing support, and regulatory alignment, they can continue to serve as essential neighborhood institutions that strengthen families and communities across New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Annie Nelson at anelson@childrensaidnyc.org



New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

In Support of Res. 0276-2026

Resolution Calling on Congress to Pass and the President to Sign Legislation Creating Targeted and Means-Tested Guaranteed Income Programs for Low-Income Individuals, Young Adults, and Foster Youth

Testimony of Children's Defense Fund – New York

June 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth.

My name is José A. Perez, and I am a Program Strategist at Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF-NY). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Res. 0276-2026.

About the Children's Defense Fund

Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF-NY) is a child advocacy organization dedicated to advancing racial and economic justice for children, youth, and young adults, particularly those impacted by poverty and systemic inequities. Through policy advocacy, community partnerships, and youth engagement, we work to improve outcomes in child welfare, youth justice, economic mobility, health equity, and immigrant rights.

CDF-NY supports Res. 0276-2026 and commends the Council for recognizing that economic security is critical to helping young people—especially those with foster care experience—successfully transition into adulthood. While we support the resolution, we urge the Council to consider how guaranteed income programs can be strengthened to provide support to young people including collaborative program development, partnership with foster youth-serving community-based organizations, and access to supports for stable and secure independence.

The Economic Reality Facing Foster Youth and Transition-Age Young Adults

Foster youth often age into adulthood without family or financial safety nets, leaving them disproportionately exposed to poverty, housing instability, and limited opportunity—especially in high-poverty cities like New York. These outcomes reflect structural barriers, not individual failure, and for many young people, economic insecurity becomes a direct extension of their foster care experience.

Why Guaranteed Income Matters

Guaranteed income is a proven, evidence-based solution to economic instability for transition-age youth. Across pilots nationwide—including [CDF-NY's YouthNPower](#)¹, [SEED](#)², the [Baltimore Young Families Success Fund](#)³, and the [Richmond Resilience Initiative](#)⁴—cash support has consistently led to improved financial stability, housing security, mental well-being, and quality of life. The evidence is clear: when people have direct resources, they make decisions that strengthen their futures. Guaranteed income does more than provide income—it creates the breathing room to focus on education, work, health, and long-term stability instead of survival.

What We Have Learned Through CDF-NY's YouthNPower

In the summer of 2023, we launched the first ever direct cash transfer pilot for youth transitioning from foster care, designed with young people who have experienced foster care. Through YouthNPower, 100 former foster youth in New York City received \$1,000 per month in unrestricted cash assistance for one year. [Findings](#)⁵ revealed increased financial stability, improved housing security, reduced stress, and greater ability to meet basic needs, pursue education, and achieve personal goals. Most importantly, young people reported feeling a greater sense of dignity, autonomy, and control over their own lives. These findings reaffirm a simple truth: when young people have resources, they know best how to invest in their futures.

Call to Action

YouthNPower taught us a critical lesson: **cash is necessary, but not sufficient**. To achieve lasting impact, guaranteed income must be coupled with investments in community-based organizations, education, housing, workforce development, and mentorship. Young people deserve more than temporary relief—they deserve pathways to lasting opportunity and economic freedom. Additionally, any guaranteed income programs must be **permanent**—pilots have illustrated the enormous benefit of unconditional cash; the time is now to move to permanent support for young people with foster care experience.

As guaranteed income efforts for foster youth move forward, programs must be developed and implemented in deep partnership with young people with foster care experience and with community-based organizations serving them. Expertise from young people provides invaluable insight into program development and implementation, and partnership with community-based organizations bring the trust, relationships, and expertise needed to support young people through the transition into adulthood.

¹ "YouthNPower," *YouthNPower*, accessed June 26, 2026, <https://youthnpower.org/>.

² "SEED," *Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration*, accessed June 26, 2026, <https://www.stocktondemonstration.org/>.

³ "Baltimore Young Families Success Fund," *City of Baltimore Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success*, accessed June 26, 2026, <https://www.bmorechildren.com/guaranteed-income>.

⁴ "Richmond Resilience Initiative," *City of Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building*, accessed June 26, 2026, <https://www.rva.gov/community-wealth-building/richmond-resilience-initiative>.

⁵ "Starting to Live: Findings of a Direct Cash Transfer Pilot for Former Foster Youth in New York City," YouthNPower, 2025, https://youthnpower.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/CORRECTED_YNP_PAR_Report.pdf.

Future **permanent** guaranteed income programs must include:

- Strong partnerships with community-based organizations serving foster youth and transition-age youth;
- Co-collaboration with young people with lived experience in program development and implementation;
- Pathways to higher education and career advancement;
- Financial capability and asset-building opportunities;
- Housing stabilization supports;
- Mentorship and peer support networks;
- Accessible enrollment (for any tax-credit based programs, carve outs must be available for foster youth to receive funds directly when they may otherwise be claimed as dependents);
- Diverse and intentional outreach strategies to ensure all eligible young people are aware of the program; and
- Long-term transition planning to ensure sustainability beyond the duration of cash assistance.

Res. 0276-2026 is a meaningful step toward building national momentum for guaranteed income policies that recognize foster youth and transition-age young adults as a priority. While it does not directly deliver resources, it carries weight—it signals that New York City is willing to name the truth of economic hardship and stand behind solutions rooted in evidence, dignity, and opportunity.

Children’s Defense Fund–New York urges passage of this resolution and continued investment in the futures of young people who have experienced foster care.

Every young person deserves more than survival. They deserve soil to grow in, not just ground to stand on—the chance to build, imagine, and live the future they choose.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

José A. Perez, MPS

Program Strategist, Children’s Defense Fund-New York

jperez@childrensdefense.org

The mental and physical anguish of advocating for my daughter Eilise Van Raadshooven against severe bullying, sexual harassment, stalking, and physical assault with injury; and institutional neglect is depicted as a "horrific nightmare" that provided daily anxiety for my daughter, fear, and into constant "survival mode" before her daily coping mechanisms, and reports were not working, leading her to nervous break downs and hospitalization. It has been a devastating toll fighting a relentless battle against apathetic school administration and negligent police youth officers.

Eilise's daily school experience has been ongoing for months since first reported in October 2025 to the school and further complaints of the leadership to the Superintendent, which also failed to intervene. Only to devolve into a state of constant fear and evasion. To avoid the abuser during unstructured time, my daughter intentionally skipped lunch, recess by surviving on daily passes provided by her teachers to hide in the school library or other quiet spaces, coming home starving.

The relentless sexual harassment, death threats, and property damage destroyed her mental health, leading to two nervous breakdowns in the spring of 2026. The bullying drove Eilise to experience suicidal ideations, resulting in a weeks-long hospitalization for severe anxiety. While hospitalized, she suffered the anguish of isolation—missing her class trip, violin practice, and her supportive friends. Physically, the trauma culminated on June 10, 2026, when she was attacked from behind with a closed fist, resulting in an emergency room visit and a diagnosed concussion on her second day back to school after almost 3 weeks. Prior to this, the same bully assaulted two of her friends as they were standing up for her in class. The school told NYPD they investigated the incident and there was no proof or witness whatsoever; therefore, no further investigation or disciplinary action was taken. Despite having written statements of students who saw the incidence occur and the medical attention that was provided by the school nurse as well as hospital.

The sacrifice of my daughter as well as myself has been tremendous. The relentless advocacy required sacrifices my own education and professional responsibilities, especially as a healthcare provider. As a sole provider to my daughter, immense stress of managing her crisis while caring for my own patients, and personal needs as well. I ultimately having to request an intermittent FMLA Paid Family Leave to attend court summons and care for Eilise. I am devastated by the loss of my daughter's innocence, her wellbeing, education, and her right to have the educational experience all students deserve. Instead, survival mode is what every day has become.

A significant portion of the trauma stemmed from the very people supposed to protect Eilise from the school administration including her principal, guidance counselor, and the parent support coordinator. Constant gaslighting, refusal to cooperate and provide safety

within the school, especially when the administration ignored multiple attempts from Eilise's outside medical team to establish a safety plan prior to her return. The ultimate betrayal occurred when the school claimed the June 10 assault that gave Eilise a concussion was "unfounded" because their internal investigation allegedly found no witnesses, despite Eilise explicitly naming the peers who accompanied her to the nurse, which is untrue. The dean pulled students from multiple classes and a written statement by witnesses were provided to the dean of the assault that led to the emergency room evaluation for my daughter. Not only did the school lie to NYPD, but NYPD accepted a verbal report from "the school" that there was no proof of an assault and no witnesses. The youth officers interviewed my daughter while she was in the hospital and took her statement, no arrests or actions were made.

Advocating for police intervention became its own exhausting battle. After initially reporting the sexual harassment and breaking of personal property on May 2, 2026 the assigned NYPD Youth Officers visited the school but failed to write a formal police report and never reached back out to me regarding their supposed investigation. I attempted by phone calls and emails to these officers to follow up on the case since incidents remained to occur at school. I visited Precinct 24 multiple times after this to ask for a police report and assistance since none had been provided. Unfortunately, without any response, I had to file multiple complaints with the Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB). It was not until May 26, 2026 that these officers, their Superior responded. The anguish was compounded when Officer Beatty called me to excuse their inaction, stating that she and her partner "take pride in their jobs and question when they want to arrest a youth because then they have a record on their name". Furthermore, the precinct insensitive requested to interview Eilise while she was still admitted to the hospital's psychiatric floor, forcing Amanda to fiercely protect her daughter from further trauma. Eilise gave almost a 3-hour statement on May 2nd, and it turned out no report was written, and no further investigation was conducted. After I made formal complaints to the officers, they remained to be inactive and silent.

The parent support coordinator, also refused to respond to my many reports via email, as well as the principal, and guidance counselor when it came to safety coordination, nor did they once attempt to implement one or any protection for my daughter resulting in severe psychological distress and literal physical injury while the institutions protected their own reputations and the abuser. The bully in question not only has a history of sexually harassing, bullying, and physically assaulting other students, he remains protected as his parents fail to be involved, the school not separating the student from those reporting incidents, the school not reporting to parents when incidents are being made, and interfering with outside investigations appropriately in order to cover up negative reports and their reputation as a school.

My daughter and other students have suffered great mental and physical anguish related to the neglect of school leadership and failing to report appropriately to support school safety. Retaliation against parents who have spoken up on the students who are affected, as well as teachers who have been retaliated against for protecting their students as well, leading to further silence due to fear of losing their jobs.

My daughter has suffered for months because every incident report was dismissed by school leadership and they fail to protect her even when the court system has had to get involved, police reports have been filed, and this goes for the failing youth officers, detective and Sergeant that refuse to further protect, serve, and implement lawful duty as form as retaliation against myself and daughter due to my complaints against them.

From speaking to community, healthcare professionals, parents, and other NYPD members, this behavior and protection for the school leadership is a toxic suppressor of students and interferes with their safety and education. It effects the parents/guardians, leaving them no choice but to “accept” that their children are not being protected but those only protected is the school leadership, or they remove their victimized child, when this only promotes the issues.

The concern for youth officers choosing not to fulfill their duties, being influenced by toxic school cultures, and perform retaliation when they are reported for failing to protect students, is an even bigger issue. The need for more than two youth officers to manage one school district is necessary. This does not provide any benefit to the hundreds of students across one district, especially when their schools fail to protect them. Though when the only two youth officers refuse to uphold their duties, nor take responsibility, they too need to be investigated, transferred to another division, further trained, and/ or further supported by peer officers who should step in when they are not.

It is my voice that I share for my daughter and the many parents across the city, state, and nation, who suffer from the negligence of safety and care for our children’s education and overall wellbeing. Due to the lack of implementation of further protection within law, school staff and officers remain unaccountable and by this testimony and School Transparency and Safety Act proposal that I drafted, there will no longer be enforced silence, but enforced justice for our children.

Kind regards,

Amanda M. Wilkinson

This Student Safety Transparency and Accountability ACT Proposal was drafted by: Amanda M. Wilkinson; mother, healthcare provider, community advocate, and former running candidate for city council in Manhattan, New York

Student Safety Transparency and Accountability ACT Proposal

I Amanda M. Wilkinson, advocate and propose a student transparency law requiring school officials, staff, school leadership, and Youth officers also called for investigation to notify and involve parents promptly when a student reports serious safety concerns. These concerns may include bullying, harassment, discrimination, racism, threats, physical assault, property damage, emotional abuse, or sexual harassment or assault involving a student.

Required Parent Notification and Documentation

- Schools must notify the parents or guardians of any student who is harmed, threatened, or placed at risk as soon as a report is received.

This prevents silencing of children who are reporting as well as leaving out transparency for the parents/ guardians to be involved while protecting their children. This also removes the ability for school leadership to retaliate against other school staff when they help protect the children in harm, the students and parents effected, as well as “reputation” of the school and leadership because they fail to report.

- School staff must document all allegations promptly and report them to the superintendent or appropriate higher-level officials if there is no resolution between the school staff, parents, and students involved..
- School leadership must ensure that appropriate disciplinary action, safety planning, and follow-up support occur in a timely manner.
- If a student is alleged to have committed harassment, assault, threats, or another serious offense, that student’s parents or guardians must be notified and counseled on next steps, including discipline, evaluation, and available support resources immediately.

Accountability for Failure to Act

School staff or officials who fail to notify parents, document reports, or elevate allegations to the appropriate authorities should be held accountable for neglecting student safety. Failure to act on credible reports of harm or danger may constitute neglect and should carry appropriate legal or disciplinary consequences.

Law Enforcement and School-Related Incidents

When youth officers or law enforcement are involved in a school-related incident, school leadership must not interfere with a proper investigation. If police reports or criminal filings are in place, school officials should not attempt to replace or obstruct the official investigative process with their own internal review.

Youth officers who fail to investigate, document, or report a school-related crime, or fail to make proper disciplinary actions according to law in a timely manner should also be held accountable for neglecting child safety and should face appropriate penalties immediately. If a student or parent make an official complaint against the youth officers in question to their supervisor or Internal Affairs Bureau, officer reassignment to the case must be immediately implemented, to prevent bias and retaliation against the student and parents/guardian or any further parties involved.

Opposition to Vaccines Mandates for Camps, School,
Employment or General Public Participation

From: Shaun Butler

Dear Politicians & Concerned:

Am writing to express my firm opposition to vaccine mandates for youth camps, educational institutions, workplaces and public spaces. Whether at the local level in New York City, across New York State or globally, public policy must unconditionally respect

individual bodily autonomy, parental rights and informed consent.

Urge you to champion legislation that completely eliminates coercive mandates and fully restores robust religious, philosophical, and physical (medical) exemptions for all individuals. This is time and energy that could be spent on frequently sterilize facilities including shelters and public area.

Public health policies cross a dangerous line when they force individuals to choose between their deeply held religious convictions or physical health realities and their right to participate in public life. The

removal of non-medical exemptions-and the aggressive narrowing of medical exemptions- has left thousands of families unfairly excluded from summer camps, schooling, employment and essential public services.

True advocacy for health must recognize that:

- **🏡Religious Exemptions Must Be Honored:** Forcing individuals or parents to violate their sincere spiritual beliefs and conscience as a condition for a child to attend camp or school is a direct violation of fundamental religious liberties.

- ✂ Physical and Mental Realities Vary: A rigid, one-size-fits-all mandates ignores the complex physical realities of individual human bodies.

Individuals with unique genetic profiles, underlying health conditions, or histories of severe adverse reactions must have the unhindered right to physical exemptions without facing bureaucratic harassment or exclusion.

Public health strategies are most effective when they rely on transparent communication and voluntary participation, rather than mandates that strip away

personal and spiritual sovereignty. Urge you to take immediate action to protect these rights and ensure that access to camps, jobs, and public spaces remains open to everyone, regardless of vaccination status.

Sincerely, We the People, Heavens & Earth

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0032-2026
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: WANDA Ascherl

Address: 2 LaPrade St

I represent: NYC DYCD

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0032-2026
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Theresa Harris

Address: _____

I represent: DYCD

Address: 2 LaPrade St NY NY 10007

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2076-1962 Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pedro Ruiz

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Family Life

Address: 443-39 Street Brooklyn, NY 11232

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2026-1962 Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Garcia

Address: [REDACTED] ST, NY 10314

I represent: Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Address: 443 - 39th Street Brooklyn, NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2026-1962 Res. No. _____

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kristie Mancell

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11215

I represent: Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Address: 443 39th St, Brooklyn, NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Connolly

Address: _____

I represent: United Neighborhood Houses

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Annie Nelson

Address: _____

I represent: Children's Aid

Address: 117 West 124th St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0142-2026

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Assembly Member Candor Davis

Address: 910 Grand Concourse Suite 15K

I represent: 77th Assembly District

Address: 910 Grand Concourse Suite 15K

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vinny Dons

Address: _____

I represent: Self

Address: _____

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vincent Price

Address: _____

I represent: FATHER SPEAK UP

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LEONARD RICHARDS

Address: _____

I represent: FATHER SPEAK UP.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Peña

Address: _____

I represent: Fathers Speak up

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Oli Kotyk

Address: 334 E 53rd St

I represent: ALLATRA Civic Platform

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 6/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dionis Fernandez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms