



# **TESTIMONY**

**Before the Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Youth Services  
Hearing on  
Preliminary Fiscal 2026 Budget**

**Presented by**

**Commissioner Keith Howard**

**March 20, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Stevens, and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. I am DYCD Commissioner Keith Howard. I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Alan Cheng, Chief Financial Officer Nevita Bailey and Special Counsel Angelina Martinez-Rubio. We are pleased to be here to discuss the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget.

Last year, DYCD served an unprecedented 480,000 New Yorkers up nearly 100,000 (26 percent) since the beginning of the administration. The year also saw another record number of jobs and summer enrichment activities for young people, as well as targeted strategies to make the city safer and more affordable.

This is possible largely due to the hard work of our dedicated providers. In that regard, DYCD recognizes challenges the provider community faces due to delayed payments. We are working diligently to review and approve financial transactions, provide trainings, as well as revise and streamline our internal policies where needed to expedite processing. Where possible, we have worked with leadership at community-based organizations to determine the best approach to address their immediate cash flow needs. We know more work is needed. We will continue to work with our oversight agencies and the provider community to ensure this work happens as expeditiously as possible.

We also recognize that providers and immigrant communities are fearful of Federal law enforcement. Protecting the privacy and safety of those we serve is a top priority for DYCD. In response, we conducted a series of trainings for provider and DYCD staff on procedures developed in conjunction with other city partners for in-person interactions with non-local law enforcement. The trainings generated great interest with over 4,000 attending and participating in robust question and answer sessions and follow-up inquiries. Providers with questions may call their program manager. Additionally, DYCD recently established a hotline for providers to call after hours to speak with a DYCD attorney. Now onto the budget.

The Preliminary Budget builds on our progress, by making investments in programs that help alleviate the effects of poverty and provide opportunities for New Yorkers and communities to flourish. We are carefully monitoring actions in Washington DC which can have impacts.

The budget stands at \$1.226 billion. It is composed of:

- \$1.104 billion, or 90.07%, in city tax levy funds;
- \$2 million, or 0.16%, in intracity funds;
- \$76.5 million, or 6.24%, in federal funds; and
- \$43.1 million, or about 3.51%, in state funding.

Part of this funding goes to one of our most successful programs – our Summer Youth Employment Program. We are deep into our planning for the 2025 season, and I would like to thank the Council for your strong support of the program. Last summer, New York City again





**Department of  
Youth & Community  
Development**

provided 100,000 summer job opportunities for young people ages 14 through 24 at thousands of worksites across the city. We were pleased that 30 City Council members hosted 124 SYEP workers, and for this summer we hope that all 51 will participate.

We released the 2025 SYEP application for participants and worksites on January 21<sup>st</sup>, the earliest application release ever. With a focus on program quality, we believe this early release will give participants more time to prepare for their summer experiences and give providers time to work with the NYC business and nonprofit community to develop additional worksites. To date, we have held 25 targeted recruitment events in priority police precincts, worked with Crisis Management Services (CMS) groups, and partnered with NYCHA so that applicants can make use of their digital vans. The online application closed last Friday, and we are continuing targeted recruitment to allow participants with barriers to employment the opportunity to apply. This year all SYEP participants will receive at least two hours of financial literacy education as required by Local Law 98. DYCD also launched a financial empowerment peer mentoring pilot, in which select Work, Learn, Grow (WLG) participants will take CUNY courses on financial literacy and serve as peer mentors during SYEP.

Work, Learn and Grow, a school-year extension of SYEP, is now serving over 7,000 youth, its largest class to date with more than one-third of enrolled youth residing in or attending school in the six priority police precincts identified in the Mayor's Blueprint for Community Safety. Also, for the first time, our CMS providers had the opportunity to participate in WLG with 19 CMS groups enrolling over 330 participants. 38 WLG participants are serving as Youth Ambassadors to students in temporary housing, with a focus on migrant youth.

These workforce programs will soon be complemented with a new program the Mayor recently announced, the Community Resources for Employment and Development (CRED). Extending DYCD's portfolio of workforce programs up to age 40, it will provide tailored support services, occupational training and paid work opportunities to 1,500 underserved New Yorkers by Fiscal 2027.

In addition to our SYEP planning, we are actively preparing for another summer of wide-ranging enrichment programs for the City's Summer Rising program, in partnership with NYC Public Schools. Applications for this summer opened March 4 and will close on March 28 and we expect to again serve 110,000 elementary and middle school students and connect them with fun, hands-on enrichment experiences to strengthen skills, develop interests and cultivate curiosity! Some examples of the programming that will be offered include drama, yoga, community service, visual art, sports, and cooperative games.

In 2023, we introduced Exploring Futures, a new feature of the program for middle school students to facilitate early career exploration aligned with their individual interests and passions. This program exposed students to a wide array of career paths, enabling them to navigate and explore fields that may have otherwise been unfamiliar to them. The program included visits to





CUNY campuses, career-connected field trips, and workplace tours. We look forward to another year of this exciting programming.

The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) officially joined DYCD in Fiscal Year 2024. This office includes the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, the Office to Prevent Gun Violence and Atlas. These programs are aligned with DYCD's mission and improve community-police relations and reduce crime, incarceration, and other contact with the justice system.

As promised when I last testified, DYCD has worked hard to build support around the ONS team and CMS providers – especially around program quality and oversight. DYCD has developed key metrics for systematic reporting on program activities and outcomes; put in place a comprehensive monitoring system and regular provider network meetings for program oversight and coordination; launched a structured implementation evaluation; and continuously analyzes real-time data from the NYPD to inform operations on the ground.

Over the first year under DYCD, the Cure Violence providers conducted over 15,000 de-escalations and mediations and supported an average caseload of about 1,600 participants at a time. Additionally, with the transition to DYCD, ONS providers have access to the agency's \$6M of capacity building and professional development services for programmatic and organizational support. One highlight of our commitment to the professional development of frontline staff was through our Family Development Credential (FDC) Program. During Spring 2024, 15 Credible Messengers from ONS programs participated in the program and all 15 pilot participants earned their credential and received college credits.

I am pleased that as part of the Mayor's efforts to address homelessness, the budget includes \$6 million to add 100 Runaway and Homeless Youth beds to serve homeless young adults, bringing the total number of beds to 913. Chair Stevens this is a big win for you, the Council, advocates and above all young people. We thank you for your tireless advocacy. We look forward to briefing the Council on how we are planning to roll out the new beds.

Finally, at the State of the City Address, the Mayor announced that the city will double the size of the Fatherhood Initiative to reach 3,000 fathers in the coming year. As you know, the program helps fathers reconnect and build stronger relationships with their children through counseling, conflict resolution training, mediation, and mentoring. As a dad, this is both professionally and personally meaningful and impactful.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss the Preliminary Budget. We are pleased to answer your questions.





# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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## Testimony submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

### Re: FY 26 Preliminary Budget - Early Childhood Education & Care Programs

March 20, 2025

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the need for continued funding for critical early childhood care and education programs. My name is Betty Baez Melo, and I am an attorney and Director of the Early Childhood Education Project at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. Every year, we help thousands of families navigate the education system, starting from the time children are born.

We believe that every child should have access to a high-quality early childhood education program where they can learn and grow in a safe and nurturing environment that sets them up for a successful education and future. Unfortunately, eligibility requirements have historically resulted in some low-income children being left out of these important programs.

We were pleased when the City launched Promise NYC in 2023 to help fill this gap and increase access to early childhood programs, and we appreciate the City Council's efforts to secure funding for this initiative over the last three years. Since its launch, the program has allowed young children from low-income families to participate in early childhood education programs that would have previously excluded them. Not only has it given these children the chance to engage with peers and develop early learning skills, the program has also created opportunities for parents to work knowing that their children are being cared for.

Unfortunately, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget does not include funding to continue this crucial initiative. If funding is not extended, children risk being turned away from their programs after June and no new families would be eligible to apply for care.



## Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

Demand for Promise NYC has exceeded capacity, and there continues to be a critical need for this program. In Fiscal Year 2025, the City allocated \$25 million for Promise NYC. We're calling on the City to extend and baseline at least \$25 million for this initiative in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

We are similarly concerned that without significant additional investments, thousands of children will lose access to child care and education programs because of a shortfall in the City's Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) funds. We are pleased that, with the support of New York State, New York City has been able to expand the number of children receiving low-income child care vouchers in recent years. In fact, between June 2022 and February 2025, the number of New York City children using a low-income child care voucher increased from 7,400 to more than 60,000. However, we are deeply concerned that the City has indicated it will be unable to maintain this level of service unless there is a substantial increase in funding. The much-needed increase in market rates implemented in October 2024 will result in New York City and other counties needing more funding to serve the same number of children, but such increased funding was not included in the Governor's Executive Budget. Furthermore, New York City is expecting the demand for mandatory child care vouchers to increase with the reinstatement of cash assistance work requirements. The increase in market rate, as well as the growing demand among families the City is mandated to serve, requires more funding.

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has indicated that the City will need an estimated \$2.006 billion in the FY 2026 New York State budget for the City's Child Care Assistance Program in order to continue to serve the same number of low-income children moving forward in addition to the growing number of families the City is mandated to serve. This total funding amount includes an additional \$127 million for FFY25 and a total of \$1.879 billion for FFY26 (about \$860 million above the Governor's commitment). Without increased financial support, the City has estimated that, as families recertify for continued assistance, each month, *4,000-7,000 children would lose child care assistance* due to insufficient funding. Having thousands of children lose child care assistance in the middle of the year would be extraordinarily disruptive and destabilizing for children, families, providers, and employers. We urge the Council to work with the Governor and State Legislature to ensure funding is allocated to maintain the City's current capacity to provide subsidized care for low-income families and prevent thousands of children from losing much-needed child care assistance.

We are attaching Advocates for Children's full [budget priorities](#). We look forward to working with you as the budget process moves forward. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.





ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN OF NEW YORK

# City Education Budget Priorities for FY 2026

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## Sustain impactful programs.

We appreciate that last year, in the face of expiring federal stimulus funding and city funding, the Administration and the City Council provided continued funding for many impactful education programs that would have otherwise been rolled back or eliminated. While a number of these programs were baselined, others were funded for one year only. The Mayor's FY 2026 Preliminary Budget extends funding for two of them—Summer Rising and Learning to Work—for another year, but many other critical programs were left out and are once again at risk of severe cuts. We are calling on the City to avoid taking a step backwards and **extend and baseline funding for these programs**—helping to ensure their long-term stability and support for students and families.

Key programs left out of the Preliminary Budget that are funded with one-year city dollars expiring in June 2025 include:

- Early Childhood Education
  - Preschool special education classes (\$55M)
  - Promise NYC (\$25M)
  - 3-K and Pre-K: 3-K (\$112M), Extended day seats (\$25M), and Outreach (\$5M)
- Immigrant Family Communication and Outreach (\$4M in expiring funds; we are requesting an increase of \$3M, for a total allocation of \$7M, for FY 2026)
- Restorative Justice (\$12M)
- Mental Health Continuum (\$5M)
- Community Schools (\$14M)

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## Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

It is also essential for the City to keep moving forward by increasing investments to address the pressing needs we see on the ground in our work with families every day—including the need for legally mandated preschool special education services, one-on-one or small group reading support, mental health support, and accessible schools. We urge the City to:

- Provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need (\$70M) and extend enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations.
- Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read (\$17.5M).
- Enhance services at school-based mental health clinics (\$3.75M).
- Make more schools accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities (\$450M in capital funding over five years).

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## Sustain impactful programs funded with city funding scheduled to expire in June 2025.

The following education programs are funded, in whole or in part, with one-year city funding set to expire in June unless extended in the FY 2026 budget. The funding amounts listed are the dollar amounts needed merely to sustain these existing programs at their current funding levels; unless funding is extended, students will lose access to these programs. The City should extend and baseline funding for these programs.

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### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

#### *Preschool special education classes (\$55M)*

Even as the City has expanded 3-K and Pre-K, 450 three- and four-year-olds with disabilities were waiting for the seats they needed in preschool special education classes as of late January 2025, in violation of their legal rights. We appreciate that the City included \$55M in the FY 2025 budget to open new preschool special education classes. While this funding is not sufficient to address the need for preschool special education classes and services, it has provided seats for hundreds of children with autism and other disabilities who would otherwise be going without the classes they need and have a legal right to receive. However, the \$55M is one-year city funding set to expire in June. As the City keeps working to use this funding to open new classes this year, it is important for everyone to know as soon as possible that funding will continue next year and beyond.

#### *Promise NYC (\$25M)*

No child should be turned away from an early learning program. In January 2023, the City launched Promise NYC to increase access to subsidized childcare for children who would otherwise be ineligible for existing programs due to federal eligibility requirements. We appreciate that the City increased the initiative's funding for FY 2025, allowing 1,000 children to enroll in early care and education programs—helping prepare them for success in elementary school and beyond, while also enabling their parents to work and connect with resources. However, the full \$25M in Administration for Children's Services (ACS) funding for Promise NYC will run out at the end of June if not extended in the FY 2026 budget.

#### *3-K and Pre-K: 3-K (\$112M), Extended day seats (\$25M), and Outreach (\$5M)*

3-K and Pre-K programs provide high-quality early learning opportunities to children—helping prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond. The previous Administration used temporary federal funding to expand 3-K, which had 17,500 children participating in 2019–20 and now serves around 40,000 students. We appreciate that the City has continued the program with city dollars and also invested additional funding to provide more extended day seats and do much-needed community outreach. However, the City's current investment in early childhood education includes one-year city dollars for 3-K (\$112M), extended day seats (\$25M), and outreach (\$5M), all set to expire in June.



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## **MULTI-FACETED IMMIGRANT FAMILY COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH (\$4M in expiring one-year city funds; we are requesting an increase of \$3M, for a total of \$7M)**

This initiative strengthens New York City Public Schools' (NYCPS') communication with immigrant families—many of whom would otherwise be left without important information—by using local ethnic media to share school-related updates, sending paper notices to families' homes, reaching families via phone calls and text messages, helping schools bolster their translation and interpretation systems, and collaborating with immigrant-facing community-based organizations to create and launch information campaigns. However, this work is currently supported by \$4M in one-year city funding that expires this June. Given the increase in the number of newly arrived immigrant families in New York City, it is critical for this initiative to continue, particularly at a time when changes in federal policies could lead families to keep their children out of school or avoid accessing educational services for which they are eligible. In addition to restoring the current \$4M budget, the City should invest an additional \$3M (for a total allocation of \$7M) to help meet the growing need for translation and interpretation and to help ensure information—including information about the rights of students with disabilities—reaches families who speak languages other than English via comprehensive information campaigns.

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## **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (\$12M)**

All students deserve schools where they feel safe and supported, but without sufficient resources and appropriate alternatives for addressing behavior and helping students navigate conflict, schools will continue to resort to suspensions—which do not repair relationships or make schools safer; disproportionately impact students of color, students with disabilities, and youth who are homeless or in the foster system; and have been linked with lower educational attainment and higher odds of future contact with the juvenile or criminal legal system. Restorative justice practices enable schools to keep students in the classroom while helping them resolve conflicts and build and repair relationships. We appreciate that the FY 2025 budget included \$12M in increased city funding to replace expired federal stimulus dollars. However, this \$12M was for one year only.

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## **MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM (\$5M)**

The Mental Health Continuum is a cross-agency partnership (NYCPS, Health + Hospitals, Department of Health & Mental Hygiene) to help students with significant mental health needs access expedited mental healthcare. This innovative model, which was highlighted in the [Mayor's Mental Health Plan](#) and the [City Council's Mental Health Roadmap](#), supports students at 50 high-needs schools through school partnerships with H+H mental health clinics, dedicated staff to provide students with timely access to mental health services, a NYC Well hotline to advise school staff, mobile response teams to respond to students in crisis, and training for school staff in Collaborative Problem Solving to build their capacity to address student behavior. Recognizing the youth mental health crisis, the [Mayor announced](#) last April that the City would open 16 mental health clinics as part of the Mental Health Continuum. These clinics are now up and running, serving thousands of students. However, the \$5M for this initiative (NYCPS: \$787K, H+H: \$3.74M, DOHMH: \$472K) is set to expire in June.

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## COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (\$14M)

Community schools provide students and their families with wrap-around supports and services, such as after-school programming, adult education classes, and medical, dental, and mental healthcare. Community schools have had a positive impact; a report found that compared to otherwise similar schools, community schools in New York City had significantly lower chronic absenteeism; higher on-time graduation; and fewer disciplinary incidents. While most of the City's 400 community schools have baselined funding, the City is currently using \$14M in one-year city funding to support more than 50 community schools.

***NOTE: The above is not a comprehensive list of important education programs at risk; other initiatives funded with one-year expiring city funding include:***

- Teacher Recruitment (\$10M)
- High-Impact Tutoring (\$4M)
- Arts Programming (\$41M)
- Student Success Centers (\$3.3M)

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## Make additional investments to address pressing needs.

Ensuring that key programs remain funded at their current levels is important, but not sufficient to meet student needs. In our work on the ground with families, we see a significant need for additional supports, including the following investments.

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### **Provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need (\$70M) and extend enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at CBOs.**

Parents know that the preschool years provide a critical window for addressing developmental delays, but thousands of them hit a wall when trying to secure the most basic services for their children. Forty-five percent of preschoolers with IEPs—more than 14,400 children—ended the 2023–24 school year without ever receiving at least one of the types of services the City was legally required to provide. This year, we have continued to hear from numerous families whose preschoolers are waiting for their services to begin, as well as families unable to get an appointment for a preschool evaluation in the first place. In fact, as of late January, more than 5,600 preschoolers with IEPs were receiving *none* of their mandated services—representing 22% of all preschoolers recommended for related services and/or Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services (a part-time special education teacher to help include a 3-K or pre-K student in their general education class). An additional 5,800 preschoolers were receiving at least one, but not all, of their services. While we appreciate the \$55M investment in FY 2025 to open new preschool special education classes, this funding does not address the need for evaluations or the need for services for children with disabilities participating in general education or integrated 3-K and Pre-K classes.



The City must address these legal violations and ensure young children with disabilities are not left waiting for the help they need. The City should invest and baseline at least \$70M to provide preschoolers with evaluations and mandated services by taking steps such as launching more NYCPS evaluation teams; hiring more Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) staff to help parents with the evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting process; hiring more NYCPS service providers and teachers; and allocating funding to NYCPS Pre-K Centers and schools with 3-K and Pre-K programs so that young children receive their special education services where they go to preschool.

In addition to this investment, the City should extend the enhanced provisions of the early childhood education labor agreement reached this fall to staff at preschool special education programs at community-based organizations. While AFC has no vested interest in teacher compensation, we are very concerned about the implications of returning to a system where preschool special education teachers are the lowest paid teachers in New York City, despite working with children with some of the most intensive needs—including children with severe autism, serious medical conditions, or significant behavioral needs—and doing so over the twelve-month school year. Continuing to exclude teachers of preschool special education classes from the agreement will likely result in teachers leaving for higher paid jobs, classes closing, and even more children sitting at home in violation of their legal rights.

***The City should invest and baseline at least \$70M to address the systemic failure to provide preschoolers with disabilities with the evaluations and services they need and should extend the enhancements of the recent early childhood labor agreement to staff at preschool special education programs at CBOs to help address the shortage of preschool special education classes.***

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### **Expand access to one-on-one or small group support for students who need more help learning to read (\$17.5M).**

Far too many NYC students struggle to become skilled readers: less than half of all students in grades 3–8, including only 37% of Black and Hispanic students and 21% of students with disabilities, are reading proficiently, according to the 2024 State tests. In 2023, the City launched NYC Reads, an ambitious effort to overhaul reading instruction in grades K–5. This initiative, which has now rolled out Citywide, requires each community school district to choose one of three pre-approved reading curricula to use in all its elementary schools; in the past, individual schools had free reign to choose their own curricula, resulting in widespread use of ineffective programs. While there is still much work to do to help schools implement new curricula to their maximum effectiveness, including continuing the job-embedded training critical to the initiative's success, NYCPS must also prioritize improving systems of support for struggling readers. Even when core instruction in the early grades is strong, there will always be a subset of students who need more individualized attention and targeted instruction. At AFC, we continue to hear from families of students across grade levels who have dyslexia or other reading difficulties and have been unable to access the help they desperately need. Often, we need to take legal action to help them obtain intensive private tutoring due to difficulties finding effective reading interventions in the public schools.

Building a robust system of intensive intervention and support for students struggling with reading is a necessary piece of the puzzle. While some schools have already started offering evidence-based reading interventions that align with the approved core reading curricula, many others need to buy

new materials and train educators in delivering the new programs. In addition, schools must have sufficient staff capacity to provide intervention to all students who need it. While schools receive a yearly allocation for Academic Intervention Services (AIS), these funds are rarely sufficient to hire a full-time staff member and must cover intervention in both reading *and* math. In fact, there are almost 500 schools that each received less than \$15,000 this year for AIS. Increasing that allocation and providing additional money for curricular materials and training would help schools ramp up to address the needs of struggling readers.

***The City should invest and baseline at least \$17.5 million to help schools deliver one-on-one or small group intervention to more students who need extra help learning to read.***

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### **Enhance services at school-based mental health clinics (\$3.75M).**

Children are facing a well-documented mental health crisis. School-based mental health clinics (SBMHCs) provide on-site mental health services to children during the school day, including psychiatry, medication management, family peer support, youth advocacy, and counseling. SBMHC staff work closely with school staff to identify children in need and coordinate services. SBMHCs work to engage the whole family and can serve family members at their community location. SBMHCs provide crisis mental health services, helping to ensure children receive a supportive response when they are in need and reducing the use of suspensions and punitive disciplinary measures.

Currently, most funding for SBMHCs comes from Medicaid, which does not adequately cover the range of supports and services that students and school communities need. Supplemental funding is needed to provide additional services, such as consulting on specific behavioral supports for classrooms, working as part of a school's crisis response team, providing support to the full school staff on behavior support, and being on call to de-escalate crises.

***Providing existing school-based mental health clinics with supplemental funding to help fill this gap would allow clinics to better integrate into school communities and better support students with behavioral and mental health challenges. The City should invest and baseline at least \$3.75M to provide the additional resources these SBMHCs need.***

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### **Make more schools accessible to students, parents, educators, and community members with physical disabilities (\$450M in capital funding over five years).**

More than 30 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability, physical barriers to full inclusion remain widespread in New York City's schools—and as a result, New Yorkers with disabilities continue to be excluded from buildings that are central to public life. In fact, only about a third of schools are fully accessible to students, teachers, parents, and community members with disabilities.

Five years ago, the situation was much worse—fewer than one in five schools was fully accessible as of the start of the 2018–19 school year—and New York City invested a historic \$750 million in the 2020–2024 Capital Plan to improve school accessibility. While this funding has enabled significant progress, there is much work left to do: NYCPS itself estimated that it would take \$1 billion in each of the next four five-year plans to reach “maximum practical accessibility” by 2045.

At a minimum, the City must make the investments necessary to keep pace with the work done over the past five years. The 2025–2029 Capital Plan currently includes \$800 million for school accessibility projects, an amount that represents a *decreased* commitment to improving school accessibility once inflation is taken into account.

*The City should allocate an additional \$450 million—for a total investment of \$1.25 billion—for school accessibility projects in the 2025–2029 Capital Plan, with the goal of making at least 45% of buildings that serve as the primary location for a school fully accessible by 2030.*





*Project UNITE* is a partnership of the NYC Youth Advisory Board (YAB), the Ali Forney Center and YouthNPower: Transforming Care at the Children's Defense Fund-New York. *Project UNITE's* mission is to transfer power to young people to hold systems accountable to dismantle the silos and fill the gaps that perpetuate the intersection of the child welfare system and youth homelessness. We envision a reality where the current systems in power are held accountable for the harm that they have caused young people, must be transformed by giving equitable decision-making power to those who have been directly impacted, must center the voices and ideas of young people by giving them the support and resources they need to establish their own futures.

Testimony of Eboney McClellan  
Ali Forney Center Youth Advocate, Project Unite  
Before the New York City Council  
Hearing on FY26 Budget – Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Services

March 23, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Good morning/afternoon, everyone. My name is Eboney McClellan, and I am a Black queer advocate working with the Ali Forney Center, where I focus on addressing the needs of homeless youth. I am writing to urge you to improve the city's response to the homeless youth crisis by including an additional \$16,455,000 in funding for the priorities outlined in this year's New York City FY26 Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) budget.

As a young advocate who has navigated homelessness through the shelter system, I have firsthand insight into what is needed in our drop-in centers. The Ali Forney Center provides stabilization for youth aged 16-24. While our efforts have seen progress in recent years, one key concern remains: the lack of available beds for new clients. Although the Ali Forney Center is a critical resource, we are in desperate need of additional RHY beds for youth aged 21-24. Many programs, unfortunately, leave these young people with no choice but to access cisgender shelter systems, which often lack the necessary support and resources for our community. Our goal is to keep youth safe by providing them with stable beds at night as they navigate their path forward. I believe no young person should have to worry about finding a safe space; accessibility is essential for everyone.



The current bill allows for just 60 beds for youth aged 21-24, which is insufficient. Clients travel from all over New York to reach the Ali Forney Center, only to be turned away due to a shortage of beds and space for new clients. An investment in at least 100 additional beds, at a rate of \$70,000 per bed, would significantly enhance safety and tailored support for more young adults. The investments made in the FY26 budget will save a generation of vulnerable youth while also reducing future costs by preventing adult homelessness. We urge you to prioritize these funding needs to ensure that New York City's RHY services remain comprehensive and effective.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting runaway and homeless youth. We look forward to working with you to make these priorities a reality.

Sincerely,

Eboney McClellan  
Ali Forney Center Youth Advocate

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Eboney McClellan.



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Testimony of Maje Louverture

Ali Forney Center Youth Advocate, Project Unite

Before the New York City Council

Hearing on FY26 Budget – Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Services

3/20/2025 Children & Families Budget Hearing

March 23, 2025

Hello Chair Stevens, my name is Maje Louverture. I have survived homelessness in New York in tremendous thanks to crisis RHY shelters throughout the city. During my time in the shelter system, I received mental health support services, case management and most importantly a place of refuge to stay safe as I aspired towards increased stability. For youth like myself who are tasked with surviving in the unforgiving economic pressure of this city, RHY programs serve as a safety net preventing the intensification of the current unfortunate circumstances we find ourselves in. In light of recent events and the increased risk of housing insecurity amongst youth I would like to ask that you in the upcoming budget you standardize the financial support of RHY and TILs services to \$70k per bed as well as baseline a \$1.3million contract increase for all street outreach and drop in center RHY programs.

In addition, I propose that you allot \$2.6million to fund Mental Health-Focused Pilots. During my time in the shelter system, I struggled severely with mental health upkeep. Though there were some initiatives taken place by the organization that housed me it was nowhere near enough to adequately support my peers and myself.

Maintaining proper mental health is essential for youth rehabilitation as the state of one's mental health typically set the stage for any ventures or aspirations we may be working towards. Without access to proper mental health support services, youth are left to fend for ourselves in a fast moving and demanding world.

Sincerely,

Maje Louverture  
Ali Forney Center Youth Advocate





*Project UNITE* is a partnership of the NYC Youth Advisory Board (YAB), the Ali Forney Center and YouthNPower: Transforming Care at the Children's Defense Fund-New York. *Project UNITE's* mission is to transfer power to young people to hold systems accountable to dismantle the silos and fill the gaps that perpetuate the intersection of the child welfare system and youth homelessness. We envision a reality where the current systems in power are held accountable for the harm that they have caused young people, must be transformed by giving equitable decision-making power to those who have been directly impacted, must center the voices and ideas of young people by giving them the support and resources they need to establish their own futures.

Testimony of Nedelyn Helena-Diaz  
NYC YAB Co-Chair, Project UNITE  
Before the New York City Council  
Hearing on FY26 Budget – Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Services

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of the City Council,

My name is Nedelyn Helena-Diaz, and I am the Co-Chair of the NYC Youth Action Board

(YAB) and a member of Project Unite. I am here today because I know firsthand what it means to be a young person navigating homelessness in New York City. I know what it feels

like to wonder where you'll sleep next, to try to survive in a system that often overlooks young people, and to fight every day for stability. I am not just speaking on behalf of myself, I am speaking for every young person who is still out there, struggling to find a safe place to call home.

The runaway and homeless youth (RHY) system is a lifeline, but right now, it is not enough.

We need more than just a bed and a meal; we need a real investment in our futures.

That is

why I am urging you to include an additional \$16,455,000 in the FY26 budget for RHY services.

The most urgent priority is increasing the bed rate for Crisis Shelter and TILs services to \$70,000 per bed. The current funding model does not reflect the true cost of care.

Providers

are being forced to do more with less, and that means young people, who are already in crisis, aren't getting the stability and support they need. A consistent, equitable bed rate will ensure that no matter where a young person seeks shelter, they receive the same level of care and safety.

We also need to fund support services for newly arrived youth and unaccompanied minors.

More and more young people are coming to New York City alone, without family, without resources, and without anyone to help them navigate this system. Drop-in centers have been stepping up to meet this growing need, but they are being stretched beyond their limits. A one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers will allow them to continue doing this essential work and give these young people a real chance at stability.

Another critical ask is funding youth-specific immigration legal services. Many young people in RHY programs qualify for immigration relief, but they do not have access to the legal representation needed to secure their status. Right now, city-funded legal services do not extend to them. Allocating \$625,000 for five full-time immigration attorneys dedicated

to RHY programs would remove a major barrier for undocumented and newly arrived youth, helping them access the stability and safety they deserve.

Beyond that, we must recognize that homelessness is not just a housing issue it is a mental

health issue. Youth in RHY programs are facing severe trauma, yet there are not enough

mental health resources tailored to their needs. We are asking for \$2.6 million to fund two

mental health-focused TIL pilot programs that provide on-site clinical services and intensive case management. These programs could be life-changing for so many young people who are struggling in silence.

Finally, we need 100 additional RHY beds for youth ages 21-24. Right now, there are only 60

beds citywide for this age group. That is unacceptable. Young adults who have already survived so much should not be left with nowhere to go simply because they've aged out of

services. An investment of \$5.6 million would provide safety, stability, and a real chance at

independence for these young people.

This is not just about money, this is about lives. Without these investments, more young



people will fall through the cracks. More young people will be forced into dangerous situations. More young people will lose hope. But with the right funding, we can change that.

We can make New York City a leader in the fight to end youth homelessness. I urge you not turn your back on us. Fund these critical programs, invest in our futures, and show young people that their lives matter.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this fight. I look forward to working together to make these priorities a reality.

Sincerely,

Nedelyn Helena-Diaz  
NYC YAB Co-Chair, Project Unite

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Nedelyn Helena-Diaz.



**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026  
Preliminary Budget Hearings  
Committee on Children and Youth  
March 20th, 2025**

**Christine Serdjenian Yearwood, New York Field Organizer  
Armenian-American Action Network**

My name is Christine Serdjenian Yearwood, and I am the New York Field Organizer at Armenian-American Action Network. Thank you very much for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to submit our testimony.

Armenian-American Action Network is an advocacy and research organization fighting anti-Armenian racism in the United States, teaching Armenian-American history, and forwarding civil rights, immigrant rights, and refugee rights for our and all communities. Armenian-American Action Network is a proud member of the 18% and Growing Campaign, a critical and diverse city-wide campaign uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members. The 18% and Growing Campaign advocates as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color as *“We Are Building A Community Too Powerful To Ignore.”*

Armenia is a nation in West Asia within the South West Asian and North African (SWANA) region. We are transnational indigenous people whose homeland spans many current-day nation states, and is not limited to one geographic border. Armenians continue to face ongoing erasure, displacement and discrimination in our homelands. Every year, Armenians immigrate to New York City, often by way of traumatic events. Armenians have made New York City home for generations, coming here as a result of the Armenian Genocide, Baku pogroms, 1988 Armenian Earthquake, Syrian War, Beirut Blast, Artsakh Wars in 2016 and 2020, and ethnic cleansing in 2023. Even so, we persevere and enrich this city with our skills, culture and traditions.

I live in Queens and am a parent to three young children, all of whom attend public schools and frequently use our public libraries, community centers, parks, and more. As the most culturally diverse county in the nation, Queens is home to the majority of Armenians in the tri-state area,

with around 50,000 Armenian residents. New York has six Armenian churches and two Armenian day schools, as well as cultural centers, restaurants, and grocery stores.

Yet despite the AAPI community's presence and growth here in New York City, funding for our communities is lagging. AAPI New Yorkers are 18% of the population, but receive less than 5% of the city's discretionary dollars. Being underfunded results in our communities being underserved and made invisible. We are marginalized in data collection and disaggregation, education curriculum, cultural programming, support systems, and by health care service providers. In particular for Armenian-Americans, an equitable budget would help us with data collection and disaggregation and to create culturally responsive programming for our youth.

We urge the New York City Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$7.5 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4.5 million, among other key city-wide initiatives. We need funds to take further steps toward creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora. We echo the fiscal requests of the greater AAPI community that would enhance the health, wellness, and economic well-being of all of us as New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Christine Serdjenian Yearwood  
*New York Field Organizer*  
*Armenian-American Action Network*



**Testimony of the Article 10 Family Defense Organizations:**

**Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, Center for Family Representation, and  
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem**

**Presented Before**

**The New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth**

**Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**March 20, 2025**

This testimony is submitted jointly by the Bronx Defenders (BxD), Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), Center for Family Representation (CFR) and the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) (collectively the “family defense organizations”). Our offices are the primary providers of mandated legal representation to parents who are eligible for free representation in Article 10 cases filed in family court in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island and Queens. Together, we have created a nationally-recognized model of interdisciplinary representation for parents charged with neglect or abuse and at risk of family separation and termination of their parental rights. Our model, which provides comprehensive representation to low-income parents through teams of attorneys, social workers and parent advocates, has been recognized as the most effective model of representation of its kind.<sup>1</sup> Together, we have prevented thousands of children from needlessly entering and languishing in the foster system and have reduced the foster system census in New York City by over 50%.<sup>2</sup> This translates to nearly \$40 million in annual savings in foster system expenditures for New York City,<sup>3</sup> and the preservation of family bonds that are priceless to our clients, their children, and society at large.

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<sup>1</sup> See Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore 27-28 (February 2019); see also Martin Guggenheim & Susan Jacobs, *A New National Movement in Parent Representation*, 47 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 44, 45 (2013), available at <https://cfny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-New-National-Movement-in-Parent-Representation-Clearinghouse-Review.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See Martin Guggenheim and Susan Jacobs, *Providing Parents Multidisciplinary Legal Representation Significantly Reduces Children’s Time in Foster Care*, American Bar Association (June 3, 2019), available at [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/january---december-2019/providing-parents-multidisciplinary-legal-representation-signifi/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/january---december-2019/providing-parents-multidisciplinary-legal-representation-signifi/)

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

We thank the Children and Youth Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony about the critical services our agencies provide to low income New Yorkers and the need to ensure that these services are fully funded to ensure their effectiveness.

The primary goal of our work is to provide high quality legal representation to parents in high-stakes investigation and family court cases and ameliorate the underlying systemic barriers that drive families into this system, such as lack of access to quality health and mental health treatment, material supports and appropriate education and services for children with disabilities. We also aim to reduce the harm of the consequences of system involvement, such as criminal charges, housing and income loss, education issues and inability to adjust immigration status. Collectively we represent thousands of parents each year. Since 2007 when New York City first contracted with family defense organizations to represent parents, we have represented more than 50,000 parents in family court, touching the lives of close to 110,000 children, the vast majority of whom are Black and Brown and live in the most marginalized, low-income communities in New York City.

Since fiscal year 2020, we have also provided two critical services to low-income parents, in addition to our mandated legal representation in court, made possible with City Council funding of the **Right to Family Advocacy Project** through the Family Advocacy and Guardianship Support Initiative:

- **Early defense:** We provide support, guidance, and legal representation to parents during an investigation by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), with the primary goal of preventing family separation and unnecessary family court filings.
- **SCR advocacy:** We provide legal representation in administrative proceedings to help parents clear or modify (amend or seal) their Statewide Central Register (SCR) records that result after ACS investigations, thereby preserving and expanding low-income New Yorkers' employment opportunities.

The City Council plays an important role in monitoring the provision of ACS services and in ensuring that the families affected by ACS involvement have legal representation that is adequately funded to achieve fair and positive outcomes for families. This testimony addresses the importance of adequately funding the City Council's Right to Family Advocacy Project.

We ask the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project. Given that we have not had an increase in funding for this work in five years and the demand for services has increased, **we are asking for a very modest increase in the overall funding for our four offices from \$2.6 million to \$3.3 million to increase capacity based on need and address rising costs.**



## **I. Family Defense Offices Have Proven to be Highly Successful in Providing High Quality Legal Representation to Families and Reducing the Time Children Spend in the Foster System**

Family defense organizations play a pivotal role in fulfilling the city's legal obligation to provide legal representation in Article 10 and related cases. In the face of the catastrophic prospect of losing parental rights, these organizations not only provide essential legal guidance to safeguard these rights but also serve as a crucial bulwark for families facing the threat of separation, which disproportionately harms families of color. Through comprehensive, zealous advocacy and social service support, the preservation of family bonds takes precedence. This approach leads to a notable reduction in the time children spend in the foster system, resulting in the prevention of needless trauma to children and significant savings for the city.

Over the last almost 18 years, our offices have honed family defense practices that serve as a state and national model, recognized as the most effective approach to advocacy for parents in family regulation cases.<sup>4</sup> The Commission on Parental Representation, established by Chief Judge DiFiore to examine the state of representation for indigent parents in New York State, issued an interim report in February 2019 following extensive hearings. It recommended the adoption of New York City's parent representation model in family regulation cases statewide. The Commission concluded that:

“the best chance of successful implementation of its recommendations is through statewide expansion of institutional providers and attorneys specializing in child welfare law. The use of attorneys dedicated to, and proficient in, such representation would improve the quality, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of parental representation statewide.”<sup>5</sup>

The benefit of New York City's contract with family defense organizations to fulfill the mandate of parent representation cannot be overstated: our work dramatically reduces both the number of families separated by ACS, and the amount of time children spend in the foster system.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 90 percent of our clients face allegations of neglect, not abuse. These cases typically stem from poverty-related issues, with allegations often including poor or unstable housing conditions, food insecurity, income instability, concerns about children's education attendance, domestic violence, excessive discipline, or inadequate childcare. Additionally, many

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<sup>4</sup> See Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore 27-28 (February 2019); see also Martin Guggenheim & Susan Jacobs, *A New National Movement in Parent Representation*, 47 CLEARINGHOUSE REV. 44, 45 (2013), available at <https://cfny.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-New-National-Movement-in-Parent-Representation-Clearinghouse-Review.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore at 26.

<sup>6</sup> Center for New York City Affairs, The New School, *Watching the Numbers: A Six-Year Statistical Survey Monitoring New York City's Child Welfare System* (November 2016), available at [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5849a22f725e254385d753eb/1481220657883/FINAL\\_Watching+the+Numbers\\_2016.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5849a22f725e254385d753eb/1481220657883/FINAL_Watching+the+Numbers_2016.pdf).

of our clients struggle with untreated mental health and/or substance use disorders which are exacerbated by the stress of poverty, or confront other challenges, such as cognitive disabilities. A significant portion of our clients have experienced periods in the foster system during their childhood or are young parents currently navigating the foster system.

Despite the challenges our clients face, research and our experience demonstrate that the vast majority of these families suffer more trauma and deeper harm from being separated than from receiving support to remain unified. Family separation, even for short periods, inflicts significant short and long-term damage on children, a harm,<sup>7</sup> recognized by the state's highest court.<sup>8</sup> Prolonged separation subjects children to extended and severe toxic stress provoked by a persistent fight-or-flight trauma response. If subjected to toxic stress continuously over an extended period, the damage inflicted on a child's brain becomes irreparable.<sup>9</sup> Even brief stays in the foster system can impair a child's ability to form attachments, regulate emotions, develop healthy coping mechanisms, nurture decision-making skills, manage self-regulation, and maintain healthy relationships.<sup>10</sup> Quality representation for parents is essential to prevent unnecessary and traumatic family separation while also promptly reuniting families, and ensuring that beneficial, family strengthening services are in place. As a result of our representation, many of our clients' families remain intact during legal proceedings allowing parents, children, and families to access the support they need.

The family policing system<sup>11</sup> disproportionately punishes, controls, surveils, and forcibly separates low-income Black and Brown families. Just as our modern police systems descend from slave patrols, the family policing system is deeply rooted in our country's history of separating Indigenous, Black, and low-income children from their families.

The system's origins are in the separation of enslaved Black children and parents to profit from their labor, and in the government-supported separation of indigenous children from their parents meant to destroy the Indigenous communities whose land the government was seeking to colonize. The system continued with "Orphan Trains" of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when The Children's Aid Society, still in operation in New York City today, separated thousands of poor Italian and Irish immigrant children from their families, and sent those children to the Midwest to work in indentured servitude. Family connections in impacted communities were considered inferior and therefore breaking those connections was not considered harmful, and more importantly, to society's benefit.

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<sup>7</sup> Shanta Trivedi, *The Harm of Child Removal*, 43 New York University Review of Law & Social Change 523 (2019).. Vivek Sankaran. "A Cure Worse Than the Disease? The Impact of Removal on Children and Their Families." Christopher Church and Monique Mitchell, co-authors. *Marq. L. Rev.* 102, no. 4 (2019): 1163-94.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., *Matter of Jamie J.*, 30 N.Y.3d 275, 280 n.1 (2017); *Nicholson v. Scopetta*, 3 N.Y.3d 357 (N.Y. 2004).

<sup>9</sup> See Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Brain Development, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVwFkcOZHJw&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>10</sup> Vivek Sankaran, co-author. "Easy Come, Easy Go: The Plight of Children Who Spend Less Than 30 Days in Foster Care." Christopher Church, U. Pa. J. L. & Soc. Change 19, no. 3 (2016): 207-237.

<sup>11</sup> [Abolishing Policing Also Means Abolishing Family Regulation](#)

The family policing system that ensnares families today is rooted in this history, but its funding did not explode until public assistance programs were slashed in the 1980s and 1990s in response to Black families demanding equal access to social programs through the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. These cuts were coupled with billions of dollars in new funding for the foster system. In 1981, the federal foster system budget stood at less than \$500 million; today, it stands at nearly \$10 billion. With this huge increase in funding, family regulation agencies targeted the Black community, using the same racist and classist ideology motivating the war on drugs and the cuts to public assistance. In New York City today, when ACS decides to formally file a case against a parent in family court, 41 percent of the time it is against a Black parent. Only 6 percent of the cases ACS files are against white parents.<sup>12</sup> Black children are 10 times as likely to enter the foster system than white or Asian children and twice as likely as Latine children.<sup>13</sup>

Research from all corners, from the Federal Children's Bureau to the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges to numbers reported by ACS itself, demonstrates that Indigenous, Black and Brown families are disproportionately represented in reports, investigations, and prosecutions by the family regulation system and that Indigenous, Black and Brown children are disproportionately represented in the foster system. This is not the work of a few bad apples. These outcomes, demonstrated reliably and consistently across a variety of social science research, are a result of structural racism masquerading as social betterment. An internal ACS racial equity audit "described a 'predatory system that specifically targets Black and brown parents' and subjects them to 'a different level of scrutiny.'<sup>14</sup>"

When the communities we represent are investigated by ACS, caseworkers often use misinformation and the threat of family separation and police involvement to coerce vulnerable families to relinquish their constitutional rights before a court is even involved.<sup>15</sup> Hospitals target pregnant low-income Black and Brown parents to drug test them without consent, regardless of whether there are any actual child safety concerns, a legacy of the now-debunked racist "crack baby" myth. The family regulation system has become a weapon used by landlords seeking to harass tenants, jilted lovers, and vengeful family members by allowing anonymous reports to be filed with little accountability, leaving families to pick up the pieces after the resulting intrusive investigations.

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<sup>12</sup> Racism at Every Stage: Data Shows How NYC's Administration for Children's Services Discriminates Against Black and Brown Families, NYCLU (June 30, 2023 at <https://www.nyclu.org/report/racism-every-stage-data-shows-how-nycs-administration-childrens-services-discriminates#:~:text=other%20demographic%20group.-,Although%20Black%20people%20comprise%20only%2023%20percent%20of%20the%20New,their%20children%20ripped%20away>).

<sup>13</sup><https://familypolicynyc.org/data-brief/racial-disparities/>

<sup>14</sup> Andy Newman, Is N.Y.'s Child Welfare System Racist? Some of Its Own Workers Say Yes., *New York Times*, (Nov. 22, 2022), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/nyregion/nyc-acsracism-abuse-neglect.html>

<sup>15</sup> Eli Hager, Police Need Warrants to Search Homes. Child Welfare Agents Almost Never Get One, ProPublica (Oct. 13, 2022), available at <https://www.propublica.org/article/child-welfare-search-seizure-without-warrants>



All these processes create a dynamic that entangles low-income Black and Brown families into a system that, more often than not, tears them apart. For the people who find themselves in these horrifying circumstances, their attorney and social worker team is the lifeline to bring their children home, which is why our services are critical and must be properly resourced and supported by the city.

Our interdisciplinary approach, treating lawyers, social workers, paralegals, and system-impacted parent advocates as equal partners in client-centered representation, is fundamental to our success. Parent advocates, often parents with lived experience in the family regulation system, serve as “credible messengers”, offering invaluable peer-to-peer support to parents navigating the family regulation system. Social work and parent advocate support play a pivotal role in addressing our clients’ complex needs, providing crucial assistance both inside and outside the courtroom. From the initial court appearance, social workers and parent advocates guide clients through various services, such as domestic violence shelter placement, family therapy, education consultants, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, crucial for preventing family separation. Paralegals play a vital role in assisting attorneys with legal filings, organizing discovery materials, drafting subpoenas, handling appeals, and managing client intake.

Our collaborative team of social workers, parent advocates, attorneys and clients work closely together to develop legal strategies and service plans tailored to the client’s goals and family needs. Unlike ACS caseworkers, our parent advocates and social workers center parental involvement in finding solutions for their families, emphasizing support rather than separation. Social workers perform comprehensive and on-going family assessments to identify needs and ensure appropriate services and interventions are implemented. They advocate for clients at ACS and foster-care agency conferences, maintaining continuity between courtroom advocacy, agency practices, and a parent’s evolving circumstances.

A critical role of our social work and parent advocate teams is building trusting relationships with clients and amplifying their voices in and outside of court. They attend ACS and foster agency conferences across the five boroughs to advocate for appropriate visitation and service plans aligned with each family’s needs, facilitating family reunification. Utilizing their deep understanding of each client’s situation and their knowledge of New York’s social services landscape, our out-of-court staff connect parents with necessary resources and assist with navigating the shelter and benefits systems. Social workers also mediate and resolve issues that can arise between clients and ACS, foster agency workers, foster parents, and/or service providers.

Our offices develop close relationships with community-based programs serving New York’s immigrant communities, ensuring clients have access to culturally competent service providers

and language-appropriate services. For clients ineligible for medical insurance, our social workers identify programs offering no-fee services.

## **II. City Council Should Continue to Support the Right to Family Advocacy Project**

The Right to Family Advocacy Project, funded through the City Council's Family Advocacy and Guardianship Support Initiative is a crucial support system for parents and caregivers navigating the complex, traumatic family regulation system. By providing vital legal and social work representation at two pivotal stages, this initiative is a lifeline to families in need:

1. During an ACS investigation, the project strengthens family stability, avoids unnecessary family court intervention, and crucially prevents family separation.
2. In administrative proceedings to amend and seal parents' and caregivers' records with the State Central Register, the project fosters expanded employment opportunities and economic stability for already vulnerable and marginalized families.

This project provides desperately needed due process protections and advocacy, particularly for the predominantly Black and Brown families disproportionately targeted by the family policing system. Without this initiative and access to counsel, many of these families would face the loss of their children and the permanent fracture of their family - a glaring injustice that the City Council's funding is necessary to rectify.

**Our organizations are requesting \$3.3 million (\$825,000 each) for FY26.** City Council funding for the Right to Family Advocacy Project is paramount. We request \$3.3 million (\$825,000 per organization) for FY26. This increase from the current \$650,000 per organization will enable us to meet the needs of a greater number of impacted families while also accommodating rising costs, including salaries, OTPS, health insurance, and space expenses. This support is not only an investment in families - it is an investment in justice, equity, and the future well-being of the communities we serve.

### **A. The Right to Family Advocacy Project provides critical advocacy and support otherwise unavailable.**

Currently, parents embroiled in family policing matters, who are unable to afford legal representation, are not provided attorneys until ACS files an abuse or neglect case against them in family court. Yet, critical decisions with far-reaching consequences are made before a case reaches the courtroom. These decisions can have generational consequences, determining whether families will be directed to prevention programs, whether cases will proceed to court, and, most significantly, whether children will be separated from their parents and, if so, who will care for them. Without access to counsel during this crucial investigative phase of an Article 10 case, parents are left to engage with ACS alone, make pivotal decisions impacting their family's

integrity, address allegations against them, and navigate state intervention without needed support. In stark contrast, ACS enjoys legal representation throughout their investigations.

Because families are too often separated by the family regulation system, the Commission on Parental Legal Representation established in 2018 by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore recommended that parents be granted access to counsel during a child protective investigation.<sup>16</sup>

“Giving parents representation when it matters – before they appear in court - is consistent with principles of equal protection and due process; can prevent unnecessary and prolonged separation of children from their parents; and can mitigate the disruption and trauma that accompanies State intervention into the family. Timely access to counsel may also help reduce the disproportionate percentage of children of color in New York’s foster care system.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the standards of practice for parents’ attorneys, adopted by the American Bar Association in 2006, recommend that attorneys actively represent parents during an investigation.<sup>18</sup> Recently issued eligibility standards by ILS also recommended assigning counsel to parents during the investigation stage of a case. These standards were recently codified as a court rule by the Office of Court Administration. Fam. Ct. Rule 205.19. Representation at the investigation phase serves as a crucial and much needed bulwark against a multitude of avoidable harms to the low-income, predominantly Black and Brown families, who are most often the targets of the family regulation system. *See also Family Justice Initiative Preliminary Report and Recommendations*, pp. 12-13.

This project of the City Council is a critical element in preserving family unity whenever possible. Our staff meet with parents, discuss allegations, explore potential solutions, and guide parents through the intrusive and often humiliating investigation of their family. Additionally, social workers funded by this project can facilitate the implementation of services, potentially dissuading ACS from filing a case altogether.

In all, this invaluable funding accomplishes much more than its face value, yielding far-reaching benefits that extend beyond mere reductions in court filings and child removals. It empowers individuals who are unjustly targeted by ACS, providing them with the support and resources they need to effectively navigate legal challenges that threaten the stability of their family.

**B. Low-income parents do not have access to counsel in SCR hearings and are unjustifiably denied opportunities in employment and to care for their relatives’ children.**

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<sup>16</sup> *Interim Report to Chief Judge DiFiore*.

<sup>17</sup> Commission on Parental Legal Representation, Interim Report to Chief Judge Defiore, 16 (February 2019), <http://ww2.nycourts.gov/doc/15446>

<sup>18</sup> *See* American Bar Association, Standards of Practice for Attorneys Representing Parents in Abuse and Neglect Cases 10 (2006), available at [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child\\_law/aba-parent-rep-stds.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/aba-parent-rep-stds.pdf)

At the conclusion of an investigation, ACS determines whether the report should be “indicated,” resulting in the parent or caretaker’s name being placed on the State Central Registry (SCR). This listing then precludes them from many employment opportunities, even though whether a case is indicated is not usually subjected to external review because the case never undergoes judicial scrutiny. Indeed, the majority of indicated cases are never brought to court for review, yet the consequences are profound, lasting for decades and disproportionately impacting families of color.

In New York City, Black and Latinx children represent 83% of all SCR reports.<sup>19</sup> Unsurprisingly, given their gross overrepresentation in SCR reports, 86% of all indicated reports in New York City involve either Black or Latinx children.<sup>20</sup> When considering the rate of indication for children of color, including Asian/Pacific Islander and multiple race, a staggering 93% of indicated cases in New York City involve children of color. New York parents listed on the SCR are routinely denied employment as daycare workers, teaching assistants, substance abuse counselors, home health aides, medical supply delivery people, drivers for the disabled, an array of positions in hospitals, and more, based on unproven allegations of child abuse and neglect.<sup>21</sup> Black and Brown New Yorkers are disproportionately impacted by the loss of opportunity in these professions: eighty-five percent of care workers, such as health aids, are women of color.<sup>22</sup> SCR records, accessible to employers for years, severely limit parents’ ability to secure employment that can provide economic stability for their families.

The ramifications extend beyond employment, affecting custody determinations and kinship care arrangements. Courts frequently consider indicated reports from the SCR in custody determinations, often favoring parents without an indicated report. Moreover, an indicated report may pose risks for individuals seeking custody of children through kinship care—an alternative to the traditional foster system where relatives provide care. While kinship care is widely acknowledged as the next best option when parental care is unavailable, arrangements are often rejected based on indicated reports, even if the report is from years ago. This situation forces children into foster placement with strangers, despite the availability of caring relatives.

Although there is an administrative process to challenge this outcome through hearings with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), parents generally lack access to counsel in these hearings. Yet, ACS is always afforded the benefit of counsel during these hearings. Decisions in these hearings often hinge on the interpretation of statutory and legal terms, such as “person legally responsible,” “collateral estoppel,” and “dismissed on the merits.”

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<sup>19</sup> <https://familypolicynyc.org/report/scr/>;  
<https://nysba.org/new-york-state-bar-association-finds-child-welfare-system-replete-with-systemic-racism-pushes-for-reforms/>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/2023/demographics-children-fy-2023.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> See Nikita Stewart, *The Child Abuse Charge Was Dismissed. But it Can Still Cost You a Job*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 25, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/25/nyregion/ny-child-abuse-database.html>.

<sup>22</sup> See N.Y.C. Dep’t of Consumer Affs., *Lifting up Paid Care Work* (2018).

However, parents are not provided with an attorney to advise them of their right to challenge their listing on the SCR or to advocate on their behalf. In January 2022, the laws governing SCR hearings were overhauled, introducing a new legal standard and process. The interpretation of these new provisions is still being litigated in many hearings. Part of this change in law created a category of cases where a parent should automatically have their indicated case amended to unfounded, yet it is still necessary for parents to request OCFS hearings simply to have the law followed. It is crucial for them to have legal advocates helping them ensure this happens.

By funding this program, the City Council is profoundly transforming the lives of hundreds of people who are eligible to have their names removed from the SCR so they regain the ability to access employment opportunities and restore custody rights for their children. This is especially crucial for Black, Brown, and low-income parents, to begin addressing the systemic racial inequities, economic disparities, family separation and instability perpetuated by ACS targeting.

**C. The Right to Family Advocacy Project avoids unnecessary family separation and removes barriers to employment for hundreds of low-income NYC parents.**

Through the Right to Family Advocacy Project, low-income parents in New York City gain access to attorneys via hotlines, emails, and walk-in hours when confronted with an ACS investigation and when employment opportunities are denied due to an indicated case on the SCR. During ACS investigations, teams comprising attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and parent advocates are available to advise parents regarding their rights, choices, and the consequences of decisions. This proactive, client-centered engagement results in better-informed and a more nuanced understanding of family circumstances by ACS. Our teams aid parents in providing helpful information to ACS, identifying their strengths and resources, accessing services and material assistance, and addressing underlying issues. Our advocates accompany clients to conferences with ACS, schools, and with medical providers, often leading to resolution without the need for court involvement.

In challenging indicated cases on the State Central Registry, our multidisciplinary teams represent parents and caregivers in administrative reviews and hearings, drafting affidavits, negotiating with ACS attorneys, securing necessary discovery, documentation, and court orders, and litigating cases based on the most current legal standards. This holistic approach ensures clients have access to employment opportunities to support and strengthen their families without facing discrimination.

Our success in having SCR reports amended or sealed during FY24 — which ranged from 93% to 97% among our offices—has enabled parents to access employment and support their families. Data compiled from the four family defense organizations demonstrates the effectiveness of the Right to Family Advocacy Project. With City Council funding in FY24, the family defense organizations collectively assisted over a thousand parents and caretakers during ACS investigations and SCR administrative proceedings.



Through early advocacy and identification of appropriate services and resources, we avoided unnecessary and traumatic family separations, often preventing family court filings. This has led to significant fiscal savings for the city by minimizing removals and reducing court filings, thereby conserving valuable court resources for cases where complex interventions are necessary. For instance, in 2024, approximately 86% of cases represented by BxD, and CFR during ACS investigations did not proceed to court. BDS similarly saw rates around 85% while NDS witnessed around 90%.

In cases where Article 10 proceedings were initiated, early advocacy influenced the outcomes. In the Bronx, 79% of cases filed in court in FY24, where BXD had represented the parent during the pre-court investigation, resulted in children remaining at home or being placed with family, rather than in the foster system. At CFR, 91% of children avoided foster care. At NDS, nearly 86% of children were spared the trauma of the foster system. The Right to Family Advocacy Project not only prevents family separation, reducing acute and systemic trauma, but also delivers substantial cost savings for the city.

We deeply value the opportunity to emphasize the vital need for increased funding to ensure that parents confronting the possibility of losing their children have the support they need to preserve their family bonds. The Right to Family Advocacy Project goes beyond just providing legally mandated representation—it involves delivering high-quality, holistic, and zealous advocacy and social work services that have been demonstrated to make a real difference. A difference that is only possible through the City Council’s support with an increased investment in funding that will enable us to continue serving all those in need while meeting rising expenses.

#### **D. Community Outreach and Education about Parents’ Rights**

Central to our advocacy work is doing outreach to the communities most impacted by the family policing system about their rights when they are being investigated by ACS and the availability of our services to support them through this grueling process. Our outreach also involves educating impacting communities about the right to challenge indicated reports through the State Central Register. This outreach is accomplished through a variety of tools, such as videos and messages posted on social media, as well as training and education sessions to community organizations and to groups of parents.

BDS also created a know-your-rights website for parents entitled “Your Family, Your Rights” ([www.yourfamilyyourrights.org](http://www.yourfamilyyourrights.org)), which was launched in 2021, and continues to be a valuable resource for families to increase knowledge about their rights and how to access legal support. We regularly refer community members to the website to provide legal information about ACS investigations and the State Central Registry. This advocacy and education website reached over 5,700 users in 2024 alone—with an average of almost 475 visitors per month and 433 downloads of information from the website. The website’s *Get Help* page—which offers information on how

to contact an attorney for assistance is the most frequented page. The website also includes a know-your-rights presentation available for families to watch.

In 2024, BDS launched a public awareness campaign to inform families about their rights when facing an ACS investigation. In collaboration with JMAC for Families, a local community-based organization that works with parents impacted by the family regulation system, the eight-week campaign reached New Yorkers inside MTA buses across Brooklyn, including Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, East Flatbush, and East New York, the Brooklyn communities most targeted by ACS investigations. The campaign launch resulted in a 168% spike in active users and drew hundreds of new people to the website.

In Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, CFR has been conducting outreach of its own, focusing on growing relationships with organizations that reflect the shifts in our client base. As of 2024, almost 30% of our clients are immigrants, many of whom require a variety of services beyond family defense. RTFA allows us to focus time and energy on outreach to some of the city's newest and most vulnerable populations during a time of increasing federal turmoil, and we hope our work can help prevent interactions with law enforcement agencies that might endanger our clients ability to call New York home.

## **SUMMARY**

We urge the City Council to continue supporting the Right to Family Advocacy Project and increase the funding from \$2.6 million to \$3.3 million. This increase is imperative to enhance our capacity and address the mounting costs associated with providing indispensable, high-quality legal services to vulnerable families navigating ACS investigations and scrutiny from the family regulation system.

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Center for  
Family Life  
in Sunset Park

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair  
March 20, 2025

Thank you to Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support for children and youth across New York City. My name is Jhodessa Reimer and I am a Division Director for School-Based Programs at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. I am calling on our city to prioritize fully funding year-round afterschool and summer programs for elementary and middle school youth and to advocate for prompt registration of contracts and timely reimbursement for services rendered.

For over 45 years, the Center for Family Life, a settlement house, has provided a comprehensive range of neighborhood-based family and social services. We intentionally base our K-12 programming in eleven of Sunset Park's public schools, enrolling over 3,600 youth in free, year-round, high-quality afterschool and summer programs, made possible through DYCD funding, that save our working class, immigrant families over \$15 million per year in childcare costs.

However, we simply cannot continue to deliver these services if DYCD does not recognize and fund the TRUE cost of programming, which according to the comprehensive analysis conducted by UNH, is over \$6,000 per elementary school-aged youth for a school year and over \$4,000 for the summer. The decade-old contract that we are currently operating under, that the city has extended multiple times rather than issuing a new concept paper and RFP for, funds us at *less than half* of that. It is unconscionable to underinvest in our city's children the way DYCD has been for as long as the COMPASS and SONYC contracts have continued to be extended. It is additionally unsustainable for providers who want to deliver the high-quality programs the children of New York City deserve.

Additionally, across the city, CBOs have faced untenable delays in contract registration and budget and invoice approvals. These hardships have been compounded by the city's migration from HHS Accelerator to the PASSPort system. At Center for Family Life, we are unable to voucher for expenses already incurred this year, as we are still awaiting FY25 contract registration and approval in PASSPort, totaling over \$1.9 million. Additionally, we are awaiting reimbursement for outstanding FY24 invoices totaling more than \$500,000 and FY25 outstanding invoices totaling over \$980,000. This is a total of over \$3.4 million dollars for Center for Family Life alone. And we are not the only CBO weathering these funding delays that affect essential cash flow. Streamlining and prioritizing prompt



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contract registration and reimbursement should be a top priority for DYCD so CBOs can focus on directly serving their high need communities. We urgently need this issue addressed. Thank you.



Center for  
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in Sunset Park

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

March 20, 2025

Thank you to Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support for children and youth across New York City. My name is Stephanie Ruiz, and I am a COMPASS director at Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn at PS 169. I am calling for the city to fully fund year-round programming for elementary and middle school aged youth. I started my professional journey at PS 169 eleven years ago, as an SYEP participant, by the fall, I was an assistant group leader and over the years I have been a group leader, activity specialist, program coordinator, and, for the last three years, the COMPASS program director.

I have deep roots at PS 169 and care tremendously about the diverse and vibrant community at our school, where over 8 languages, from Spanish and Mandarin to Uzbek and Hungarian, are spoken. We have more children on the waiting list than there are slots in our program of 220. Sunset Park, in particular, has seen a large influx of new arrivals and we are committed to offering an inclusive, welcoming and supportive community for those students and families as they adjust to living in a new country that is more hostile to them than ever. The hard-working families of our community depend on the childcare our program provides but they also entrust us with enriching the lives of their children by engaging them in hands on, project-based work that cultivates curiosity and builds strong interpersonal skills. Our ability to do that is at risk if we sign the COMPASS contract extension put forth by DYCD, locking us into ten-year-old rates for two more years that is less than half the true cost of running a quality program.

Designed with a whole child perspective in mind, the COMPASS program model requires that all children receive a prescribed number of hours per week in structured activity categories such as STEM and literacy, the arts and physical fitness. However, the current funding rates prohibit us from hiring qualified education specialists (a role *required* by COMPASS) or the caliber of activity specialists who can provide rigorous, high-quality instruction and teach the activities that COMPASS requires and evaluates us on. In fact, the current rate just barely allows us to meet the required 1:10 staff to participant ratio with high school and college aged staff paid less than \$20 per hour.

Providers, like Center for Family Life, care deeply about young people and want to run programs that enrich their lives, programs that help them grow socially, academically, artistically and physically. I love and take pride in hiring and developing strong staff that





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support our children's holistic development. DYCD needs to raise the cost per participant rate so we can pay our deserving staff livable wages.

Thank you.



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in Sunset Park**

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

March 20, 2025

Thank you to Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support for children and youth across New York City. My name is Jirazel Munoz, I am a Licensed Social Worker and COMPASS director at Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn at PS 971. I began at CFL when I was in high school as a Counselor-in-Training, eleven years ago. Prior to my promotion to Program Director last fall, I had served as a Youth Worker, Group Leader, Activity Specialist, Outreach Coordinator, and Program Coordinator at five of our eleven school sites. As my professional trajectory at CFL demonstrates, I am wholly committed to the children and families of the Sunset Park community and, as such, I am calling for the city to fully fund year-round afterschool and summer programming for elementary and middle school aged youth.

By funding COMPASS programs at the rates DYCD has laid out through FY27, programs are at risk of closing. Having spent the last decade working at five different schools across the Sunset Park neighborhood, I can assure you that families depend on these free programs for economic stability. In Sunset Park, not only does COMPASS support our hard-working, immigrant families for afterschool five days per week over the course of the entire school year, but families have access to an additional two and a half weeks of childcare ten hours per day for the 13 school closure days and holidays that COMPASS programs operate. In fact, principals often use free afterschool and vacation programming as a selling point to prospective families on their kindergarten tours.

While afterschool supports families' ability to aspire to economic stability, they also provide stability to the entire school community by infusing each school with dozens of additional staff working to support the development of children. At CFL, all our Program Directors work hard to build strong relationships with the principals and school administrations, parent coordinators and guidance teams, to ensure a seamless transition from the school day into afterschool. Our line staff check in with teachers daily on the well-being of participants during the transition from the school day to afterschool. Jeopardizing providers' ability to sustain afterschool programming will not only contribute to the economic destabilization of families but will destabilize entire school communities.



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By extending the COMPASS contract rather than releasing a new concept paper and RFP, DYCD is additionally preventing schools that have opened since the COMPASS contract was issued from partnering with a provider and applying for contracts that serve their school communities. In Sunset Park alone, four new elementary schools (PS 516, 958, 896, 939) and two new middle schools (MS 936, MS 428) have opened since 2013, providing much needed relief from the school overcrowding that had plagued our community for decades. These schools still serve the same hard-working, immigrant families who count on afterschool so that they can work. However, since DYCD has continually extended the existing COMPASS contracts, these schools are left out entirely from partnering with a CBO that could run a COMPASS program and offer families free afterschool and summer programming.

This is not the moment for New York City to underinvest in its children. I am calling on DYCD to fund the true cost of running year-round COMPASS programs and to follow through on issuing a concept paper and RFP for a new contract. Thank you.



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in Sunset Park**

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth

Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

March 20, 2025

Thank you to Chair Stevens and the City Council for your support for children and youth across New York City. My name is Emily Versen, and I am a Program Director at Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. For six years, I worked in a COMPASS Explore program at Sunset Park High School and am calling on the city to create a funding opportunity to replace the former COMPASS Explore contract, that DYCD ended in June 2024, with no replacement.

COMPASS Explore was part of the larger COMPASS network and for over a decade, it allowed Center for Family Life to provide opportunities each year for 75 students at Sunset Park High School to engage in leadership development and activities that developed their social and emotional well-being while building real skills for their futures. What made COMPASS Explore unique is that it was the only high school program that didn't have strict participation rules. It was open to all students, regardless of their documentation status or academic standing, and was the only high school contract that welcomed students from other schools, allowing us to serve students from the wider Sunset Park community and not just Sunset Park High School.

Across the city, providers used the flexibility the model allowed to design programming that met the needs of their populations – many used this funding to serve LGBTQ students. At Center for Family Life, the COMPASS Explore program offered meaningful, stipended leadership development and high-quality instruction in the arts. Students participated in a variety of arts and leadership activities that not only nurtured their creativity but also helped them meet personal goals and develop professional skills. As the primary funding source for youth leadership development at Sunset Park High School, the COMPASS Explore program supported the Center for Family Life “Ladder of Leadership” and facilitated significant employment opportunities for participants. Since 2020, 23 former COMPASS Explore participants have gone on to become CFL staff members, a testament to the program's success.

One current high school senior, a former COMPASS Explore participant from 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grade, now works at the Center for Family Life Afterschool Program at PS 971, the program directed by my colleague, Jirazel Munoz, who has also submitted testimony today. Last year, this same student wrote the finale song for our annual Spring Show,



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accompanying a cast of over 60 students on the piano while they performed his music to over 2,000 audience members over the course of the week of performances. This is one small, anecdotal example of how COMPASS Explore has supported students to grow, lead, and contribute to their communities.

By ending this funding with no replacement, Center for Family Life and providers across the city have lost a crucial opportunity for high school students. I urge the city to fully invest in afterschool programs for high school students, so future generations can experience the same transformative impact that COMPASS Explore has had on our students at Sunset Park High School.

Thank you.

**Center for Family Life in Sunset Park**  
**Testimony on Promise NYC**  
**Committee on Children and Youth 3.20.2025**

Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, a neighborhood-based social service organization, has been the principal provider of integrated social and human services in the low-income community of Sunset Park, Brooklyn, for over four decades. We partner with community residents to identify shared goals and implement programs that promote the healthy development of families and children and enrich the quality of life for neighborhood residents. Our mission is to ensure all community members have the support and resources that they may need to thrive including family counseling; cultural, educational, and recreational programs at neighborhood public schools; adult and youth employment programs; and an emergency storefront for food and advocacy among other services. Through this suite of comprehensive services, we engage more than 18,000 children and adults each year at fourteen community locations, including our Main Office, our Family Enrichment Center, and our twelve partner schools.

Center for Family Life in Sunset Park has been proud to be the provider for Promise NYC in the borough of Brooklyn since January 2023 with the support of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the City of New York. From the start, Promise NYC, which offers childcare subsidies for children ineligible to receive federally funded childcare assistance, has been a highly sought after service by members of our community in Sunset Park. Furthermore, we have witnessed since then an incredibly high demand across all of Brooklyn for childcare support.

Our program, which is the only program serving the borough of Brooklyn, has enrolled a total of 522 children since the program's onset January 1, 2023. We are currently at maximum capacity with 334 children enrolled, and we carry a continuous waitlist. In FY25, ACS received \$25 million for Promise NYC to support approximately 1,000 children with annual care. As of February 2025, about 1,100 children were enrolled in childcare through Promise NYC with thousands more waiting for an opening.

Promise NYC meets a critical gap toward achieving universal childcare in New York City for working families. The benefits of universal childcare are well known, and they are supported by research. It has been documented that high-quality early childcare has a positive impact on the cognitive, language and social development of children, which in turn result in increased educational and earnings outcomes. Additionally, access to affordable childcare contributes significantly to the economic health of the city as a whole through increased workforce participation, increased disposable income for families, and the prevention of income loss among businesses due to turnover and absenteeism.



For many families, Promise NYC is a key service and support, allowing parents to focus on building strong lives for their families and working to become self-sufficient. In the words of one such family: *“In 2024, I migrated to the United States from Peru along with my two children, currently ages 3 and 7, and my husband. In Peru, I owned a very small business that sold secondhand clothes and shoes. Unfortunately, reality for most business owners in Peru is that local extortion groups require business owners pay them for protection and for the “right” to do business. The government doesn’t intervene and most often businesses must pay and agree to the groups’ demands. Small business owners find it difficult to stay afloat but must prioritize paying the extortion groups because the consequences are life threatening. Many groups resort to violence and assassinate loved ones or bomb houses and businesses to instill fear into society and pressure businesses to pay their requests. When my family fled to the United States, it was our last resort. Several of my family members were kidnapped, raped and assassinated and I fled for the safety of my family. Now in the US, I have received safety, support, and stability for my family. All I can ask for is the opportunity to work to provide for my family and start a new life. That has become possible with Promise NYC. The mental tranquility that my children have quality childcare allows both my husband and me to work full time jobs. My husband was able to get a job as a construction worker and I now work in a factory packing items for shipment. We moved out of the shelter about 6 months ago. We count on Promise NYC for us to continue working and providing for our family. Without Promise NYC my children do not qualify for any type of childcare, and I would be forced to quit my job as we have no other family members that could help with childcare. Promise NYC is essential and extremely beneficial for migrant families. Please keep Promise NYC.”*

The experience of this Peruvian family is far from unique. The children that participate in the program have suffered unimaginable trauma in their countries of origin and their parents have worked incredibly hard to provide them with a better life, risking their lives to do so. Because Promise NYC exists, parents can dedicate themselves to building careers and earning a living, contributing to their new neighborhoods and communities. They can achieve this because they know their young children are well looked after. Take for example the case of this family:

*“I am a single dad of two small children. We’ve migrated from the Dominican Republic where we lived under extreme poverty. Despite my efforts to get a job to provide essentials like food and clean water for my family, the lack of opportunity led me to flee the DR and come to the US. Here in the US, I have come to work. My goal is to provide stability for my family. Promise NYC has given me that opportunity. My children are not yet in school and it if weren’t for PROMISE NYC I wouldn’t have even been able to find a job and get out of the shelter we were placed in. My children have shown great progress while being in daycare. They have established secure relationships with caregivers and coming from a single dad you can understand the great importance this has to me. They receive home cooked meals and are able to learn and grow in a safe environment. I now have not one but two jobs and without Promise NYC I don’t see how I*

*could continue to pay rent and provide for my family. Promise NYC is absolutely necessary for my family's well being."*

As you can see from the example of these two families, parents enrolling their children in the program do so because it allows them to search for and secure employment. Their desire is to provide for their families even if that means making great sacrifices. Please read the story of this single mother:

*"I, a single mom of 3 children, have migrated to the United States from Venezuela. In Venezuela, our living situation was horrific. Water and food which are essential for survival were scarce due to lack of income. I found myself unable to put food on the table for my family. We also had no access to health services and lived in extreme poverty. One of my children born with a medical condition has faced life or death due to lack of availability for the medication necessary for his survival. This is what made me take such a drastic decision of fleeing Venezuela and migrating to the United States. I was forced to leave my two smaller children behind with family members and came to the US with my oldest child. When I arrived, I have been blessed to receive support from the US government. An essential program that has helped me is Promise NYC. Thanks to this program I have stable and safe childcare which in turn allowed me to find a full-time job and move out of the shelter. Without childcare I would have no work and wouldn't have been able to find economic stability. My child receives home cooked meals after school, homework help, and a loving environment that has helped him adapt to our new way of life. I am extremely thankful and hope to continue to receive support from Promise NYC."*

Center for Family Life in Sunset Park is grateful to our partners at the Administration for Children's Services for championing Promise NYC so that all New York City parents have access to affordable, quality childcare for their children. We urge Mayor Adams and the City of New York to fund Promise NYC for another year at \$25,000,000 to secure essential childcare services for all New York City working families.

Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

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The Center for Justice Innovation is a non-profit organization that seeks to transform the policies and practices of the justice system to make it fair, effective, and humane. The Center operates the following sites throughout New York City.

Family Criminal Community Development Civil/Housing

Click on the name of any program to learn more.

STATEN ISLAND

1. Staten Island Justice Center

MANHATTAN

2. Harlem Community Justice Center  
3. Headquarters  
4. Manhattan Justice Opportunities  
5. Midtown Community Court

MULTI-BOROUGH

6. Legal Hand (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens)

BRONX

7. Bronx Child Trauma Support  
8. Bronx Community Justice Center  
9. Bronx Community Solutions

BROOKLYN

10. Brooklyn Justice Initiatives  
11. Brooklyn Mental Health Court  
12. Brownsville Community Justice Center  
13. Neighbors in Action  
14. Red Hook Community Justice Center  
15. Supervised Release Program

QUEENS

16. Queens Community Justice Center (Jamaica and The Rockaways)

Staten Island

Brooklyn

Queens

Bronx

Manhattan

Citywide

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Access to Justice  
Alternatives to Incarceration  
Driver Accountability Program  
Gender and Family Justice  
Neighborhood Safety Initiatives  
Parent Support Program  
Project Reset  
Restorative Justice Practices  
RISE Project  
Strong Starts Court Initiative  
Youth Action Institute  
Youth Impact

Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and esteemed members of the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Anthony Rowe, and I serve as the Project Director for Neighbors in Action, an initiative of the Center for Justice Innovation (The Center). We thank the Council for its ongoing advocacy and investments into our programs that help youth to thrive. We look forward to continuing this vital work in the upcoming fiscal year.

Last year, across the city, gun violence decreased by 28 percent.<sup>1</sup> However, data shows that both perpetrators and victims of gun violence are getting younger. Teenagers have become both the victims and perpetrators of gun violence at a higher rate than adults since the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates the urgent need for targeted programming to address this population.

The work of the Center is backed by a highly-skilled team of researchers. Many researchers have personal connections to participants' backgrounds, allowing for higher levels of trust and honesty. In the past few years, our research teams published two large scale studies on young gun carriers in New York City, “‘Gotta Make Your Own Heaven’: Guns, Safety, and the Edge of Adulthood in New York City,” and “Two Battlefields: Opps, Cops and NYC Youth Gun Culture.”

These studies identified fear—fear of one’s own death or the death of one’s family members—as the overwhelming factor behind the decision to carry a weapon. Participants cited the pervasiveness and unpredictability of violence as the major driver of gun-carrying.<sup>3</sup> In-depth interviews found shocking levels of exposure to violence among participants and near-universal experiences of physical harm and trauma. The vast majority had friends or family members who had been shot, and most had come under fire themselves. Many struggled to build ties to the mainstream economy. Only a small fraction had access to stable work, with most relying on informal “hustles” - like drug dealing and scams - to make ends meet. The inherent dangers of the underground economy added to participants’ motivation to carry a gun for protection.<sup>4</sup>

Concerns for physical safety among our participants are legitimate and need to be addressed. In seeking to address this, we also must understand the environmental conditions that contribute to safety. Young people in the neighborhoods we serve often experience a dearth of local activities. By engaging in our programs, prosocial activities such as field trips, attending

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<sup>1</sup> New York State Governor’s Office. (2025, January 29). Governor Hochul Announces Safer Streets as Gun Violence in Communities Participating in the State’s Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) Initiative Declined to Lowest Level on Record.

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-safer-streets-gun-violence-communities-participating-states-gun>

<sup>2</sup> Cramer, M., & Parnell, W. (2023, July 18). *Boy, 15, is fatally shot in Brooklyn after dispute among teens*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/nyregion/teen-shooting-brooklyn.html>

<sup>3</sup> Swaner, R., White, E., Martinez, A., Camacho, A., Spate, B., Alexander, J., Webb, L., & Evans, K. (2020, August). “‘Gotta Make Your Own Heaven’: Guns, Safety, and the Edge of Adulthood in New York City.” [https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020/Report\\_GunControlStudy\\_08052020.pdf](https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020/Report_GunControlStudy_08052020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> White, E., B. Spate, J. Alexander & R. Swaner (July 2023) “Two Battlefields”: Opps, Cops, and NYC Youth Gun Culture. New York, NY: Center for Justice Innovation. [https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2023/TwoBattlefields\\_Report\\_07142023.pdf](https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2023/TwoBattlefields_Report_07142023.pdf)



civic events, sports and arts, participants widen their worldview and are exposed to new passions and pastimes. Our spaces also offer critical resources such as school support and financial literacy programming, equipping participants with the tools to thrive. Community Justice Centers also hold space for conversations about conflict mediation and social issues like systemic racism, healthy masculinity, and more, creating hubs for social-emotional growth.

Below are a selection of the Center's offerings, designed intentionally to help youth flourish.

## **Bronx Community Justice Center**

The Bronx Community Justice Center works to create a safer, more equitable South Bronx through community-driven public safety initiatives, youth opportunity, and economic mobility efforts. Using a neighborhood-centric, localized model, meaningful engagement ensures programming is deeply embedded locally and thus maximally effective.

This area is highly impacted by the criminal justice system and community violence, with disproportionately higher rates of incarceration, violent crime, and disinvestment. In 2023, the violent crime rate was more than triple the citywide rate.<sup>5</sup>

Most recently, gun violence has increased in the Bronx, particularly among youth. In 2024, Bronx youth accounted for 45 percent of the city's youth shooting victims, a 17 percent increase from 2023. The South Bronx has a high rate of disconnected youth, with 30 percent of youth ages 16-24 out of school and not working, the highest high school drop-out rate in the city. The area has one of the highest numbers of juveniles held in secure detention in NYC.<sup>6</sup>

This indicates an urgent need for programming for this population. To meet this need, the Bronx Community Justice Center is requesting support for two vital youth-focused programs, Insight Initiatives and In-She-Spire.

Insight Initiatives is a community-based program for young people ages 14 to 24. The program is specifically designed to engage youth who have been impacted by violence and/or gang involvement. Insight Initiatives utilizes a localized program model that is strongly rooted in the neighborhoods the program serves and where youth live. Insight Initiatives leverages community engagement as the foundation of its successful approach. It uses a transformative, healing-centered model to allow youth to take accountability for their actions, contribute to their communities, and address root causes to prevent future justice involvement. Many of the participants, who are justice-involved youth, have also experienced harm and trauma which oftentimes leads to substance misuse as a coping mechanism. As such, with support from City Council, the Justice Center hopes to expand Insight Initiatives to also provide support for justice system-involved youth struggling with substance misuse.

In-She-Spire works to create a safe, empowering, and nurturing environment designed to address the unique needs of young women, femmes, and gender-expansive individuals between the ages of 14 and 24. In the South Bronx, this population encounters a distinct set of challenges, resulting in fractured community bonds, overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, and

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<sup>5</sup> New York University Furman Center. (2024b, May 21). Mott Haven/Melrose Neighborhood Profile. <https://furmancenter.org/neighborhoods/view/mott-haven-melrose>

<sup>6</sup> New York City Mayor's Office of Youth Employment. (2021b, January). Connecting Our Future: 2020 Disconnected Youth Task Force Report. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/youthemployment/downloads/pdf/dytf-connecting-our-future-report.pdf>



involvement in gangs. Project In-She-Spire is dedicated to fostering meaningful social connections among these young women and gender-expansive youth, with the aim of supporting positive development, strengthening resilience, and boosting self-esteem. Project In-She-Spire's goal is to provide participants with the vital skills and resources needed to navigate systemic obstacles and overcome adversity, ultimately building a brighter future.

## **Neighbors in Action**

Neighbors in Action (NIA) is a neighborhood institution that aims to improve community collaboration, foster local leadership, and make the neighborhoods of central Brooklyn safer and healthier for all residents. Staff work to reduce community violence and the negative impacts of the criminal justice system by addressing root causes such as poverty, trauma, and racism. Since its founding, Neighbors in Action has developed multiple programs ranging from anti-gun violence initiatives to therapeutic services and activities to cultivate youth empowerment through civic engagement and workforce development.

- **Promoting Community-led Approaches to Safety:** NIA mobilizes local residents to promote peace and safety. The Save Our Streets program, which takes a public health approach to ending gun violence, described in more detail in the next section, has been documented to reduce shootings.
- **Healing:** NIA's community healing and well-being programs give participants (all of whom are youth who have experienced violence) the tools they need to overcome trauma and succeed. All programming takes into consideration collective or historical trauma and resilience in order to heal.
- **Aiding Neighbors:** Doors are open to anyone who wants to come in for help. Services include helping people find jobs, apply for benefits, and access basic services. In partnership with Community Justice Connect (formerly known as Legal Hand), local residents are trained to provide legal information to their neighbors so they can resolve housing, family, immigration, and other issues. There is also an on-site lawyer who provides free legal assistance to community members.
- **Placekeeping:** By creating places that are welcoming, accessible, familiar, and conducive to economic development and social interaction, placekeeping can tip the scales in favor of safe and vibrant communities without relying on conventional law enforcement responses. Placekeeping is more than just space improvement or beautification, it is as much about cultivating resident decision-making as it is about environmental design. Annual activities include street festivals, arts campaigns, and events in spaces identified by program participants. NIA also facilitates residents to activate under-resourced and underdeveloped spaces to help promote ways that they can be transformed into spaces that are joyful, healthy, and engaging.
- **Investing in Youth:** NIA engages youth from the Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights neighborhoods of Brooklyn, New York, with a focus on long-term investments, such as building transformative relationships and creating scaffolded opportunities for skill-building in meaningful educational, recreational, vocational, and artistic opportunities. Staff works with teens to implement meaningful youth-led community projects to solve community issues. Teens are trained to become peer leaders and community organizers and help prepare young adults for the world of work. Many alumni

stay involved and participate in leadership and organizing work after they graduate from our programs.

### **Save Our Streets (S.O.S.)**

The Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) program is offered out of both Neighbors in Action and the Bronx Community Justice Center.

S.O.S. is a replication of the Cure Violence model, which employs a public health approach to prevent gun violence, partnering with local organizations, faith leaders, residents, and the individuals most likely to be involved in a shooting. Our staff prevent gun violence from occurring by mediating conflicts and acting as peer counselors to people who are at risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. We work closely with neighborhood leaders and businesses to promote a visible and public message against gun violence, encouraging local voices to articulate that gun violence is unacceptable. These local voices are respected pillars of the community, adults that youth and their families know and trust.

Using public health strategies, S.O.S. seeks to prevent the spread of violence. Its key elements are:

- **Community Outreach and Hospital Response:** The program deploys outreach workers and violence interrupters who engage youth and adults in the community at risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. The staff, who all have intimate knowledge of life on the streets, serve as counselors, offering advice and guidance on how to respond to conflicts without violence. They use positive peer pressure to redirect high-risk individuals towards school or jobs and help them think and behave differently about violence. Violence interrupters' primary focus is to prevent shootings from occurring by engaging in mediation. Hospital responders partner with local hospitals to respond to shooting injuries, connecting with gunshot-wound victims and their families at the hospital to offer resources and prevent retaliation.
- **Public Education:** S.O.S. staff and volunteers distribute palm cards and posters with messages that promote peaceful conflict resolution, decry violence, and offer S.O.S. as a safe resource for people at risk of experiencing gun violence. Merchants have signs in their windows to support our "Stop Shooting. Start Living," message and count the number of days since the last shooting. Social media, texting, and e-mails keep the community updated and involved. S.O.S. campaigns are often designed particularly to reach youth with a specific, thought-provoking focus.
- **Faith-Based Leaders:** Faith-based organizations are an essential partner in the S.O.S. violence-reduction strategy. Faith-based leaders are encouraged to preach against gun violence from their pulpits, attend vigils, counsel people who are potentially involved in gun violence, and refer high-risk individuals to the program.
- **Community Mobilization:** S.O.S. has built strong relationships with local businesses and agencies to spread an anti-violence message and promote community collaboration. Staff, participants, and volunteers organize block parties, arts showcases, presentations, and trainings to advance the idea that gun violence is both unacceptable and preventable. The program organizes community forums, rallies and marches, speak-outs, and barbecues to advance a simple idea: our community is moving past gun violence. S.O.S. also organizes a rally or vigil in the location of every shooting to call attention to and

denounce the tragic results of violence. Local residents work as canvassers to promote events and disseminate program information.

## **Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement (RISE) Project**

The RISE Project transforms responses to intimate partner violence (IPV), focusing specifically on its intersection with gun violence. Gun violence and intimate partner violence are often viewed as separate problems that require different responses, but neighborhoods impacted by high rates of gun violence also have the highest levels of reported domestic violence incidents. Access to a gun makes it five times more likely that a partner experiencing abuse will be killed.<sup>7</sup>

The project works with 30 gun violence prevention programs Citywide to train staff on intimate partner violence, facilitate workshops and ongoing groups with youth participants, and execute community events raising awareness around intimate partner violence.

Additionally, RISE provides support and technical assistance when gun violence sites are responding to incidents of violence that are IPV related. This partnership with gun violence prevention programs has provided important access to information to help identify sites where gun violence is likely to occur. As a large percentage of New York City gun violence is IPV related, anti-violence programs need to improve their ability to understand IPV dynamics. Additionally, partners have benefited through the education and prevention efforts that RISE provides to youth and the community at large. RISE also benefits from this partnership, because gun violence prevention programs that are on the ground 24/7 in neighborhoods with the highest rates of IPV are building relationships with individuals who are engaged in violence. This allows RISE direct access to a high-risk population to offer them much needed resources.

RISE also provides direct case management services for individuals experiencing intimate partner violence and provides healing circles for individuals causing harm to acknowledge and change their attitudes and behaviors. RISE also facilitates programming for youth from neighborhoods most impacted by gun and intimate partner violence. Youth engage in a seven-week program to develop a place-based project to increase public safety with a healthy relationships lens. With offerings in areas such as visual arts and journaling, RISE engages participants to design and create a culminating interactive community activation. The approach is rooted in community healing, neighborhood-specific, and place-based principles. The culminating exhibit included pieces on identity, healthy relationships, boundaries, consent and more. Additionally, youth participants have hosted a teen dating panel for their peers where they discussed topics relevant to healthy relationships and community accountability.

Moreover, RISE reaches tens of thousands of individuals each year through public campaigns (e.g., via social media), community events, and direct engagement to change community norms, increase access to resources and information, and ultimately prevent intimate partner violence. Last year (FY24), RISE directly engaged 5,222 people through a variety of community events and services, such as workshops, trainings, crisis support, small business poster board campaigns, citywide barbershop talks, and community healing responses to intimate partner violence-related incidents.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. *Rise Project*. New York, NY.

<https://www.innovatingjustice.org/programs/rise-project>

<sup>8</sup> Center for Justice Innovation. (2024). RISE\_FY Yearly Quarterly Tracker – FY24.

With continued and increased investments in RISE, we can further our capacity to reach more individuals experiencing intimate partner violence through a community-centered approach.

## **Conclusion**

At the Center for Justice Innovation, we recognize that an investment in our youth is an investment in our future. By listening to our young people, we can identify and address the factors that contribute to public safety. Investing in youth programming that targets young people in contact with the justice system or most at risk of system involvement helps to address their needs and directly contributes to increased public safety. Young people across the city, no matter where they live, deserve to feel safe and have access to the resources they need to accomplish their goals. We look forward to continuing to partner with the Council to achieve this vision.

Courtney Bryan. Executive Director

## **FY26 Center for Justice Innovation Major Proposals**

### **Multi-Site Proposals**

- **#197482 - Center for Justice Innovation General Funds - \$750,000**

#### **Innovative Criminal Justice Programs; Speaker's Initiative (Renewal/Redesign)**

**Description:** This is an application to support the continuation of the Center for Justice Innovation's innovative criminal justice responses, community-based public safety initiatives, and access to justice programs across all five boroughs in New York City. City Council's support allows us to serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers with mental health services, family development, youth empowerment, workforce development, and housing, legal, and employment resource services. Our goal continues to be improving safety, reducing incarceration, expanding access to community resources, and enhancing public trust in government to make New York City stronger, fairer, and safer for all. With expanded funding, the Center will be able to make deeper investments in housing justice: a key priority area that underpins our efforts at large to build community justice.

- **#194222 - Strong Starts Court Initiative - \$100,000**

#### **Children Under Five (New)**

**Description:** The Center for Justice Innovation seeks funding to build the capacity of the successful Strong Starts Court Initiative to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families throughout New York City and help build a sustainable program not entirely dependent on private foundation support. The Strong Starts Court Initiative is a Family-Court-based project; it employs a two-generational approach to provide specialized supports for infants, toddlers and their families who have child protection cases, and it works to educate court-based professionals in an approach focused on early child development that will transform the traditional family court response to this extremely vulnerable population.

### **Bronx Community Justice Center**

- **#192488 - Bronx Community Justice Center Insight Initiatives - \$100,000**

#### **Court Involved Youth Mental Health (New)**

**Description:** The Bronx Community Justice Center (Justice Center), an operating project of the Center for Justice Innovation, seeks Court Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative funding to enhance the Insight Initiatives program (Insight). Insight is a diversion and alternative-to-incarceration program for young people ages 14 to 24. Insight is specifically designed to engage youth who have been impacted by violence and/or gang involvement. Insight is a community-based, localized program model that is strongly rooted in the neighborhoods the program serves and where youth live. Insight leverages community engagement as the foundation of its successful approach. Insight uses a transformative, healing-centered model to allow youth to take accountability for their actions, contribute to their communities, and address root causes to prevent future justice involvement. Many of the participants, who are justice-involved youth, have also experienced harm and trauma which oftentimes leads to substance misuse as a coping mechanism. As such, with support from City Council funding, the Justice Center hopes to expand Insight to also provide support for justice system-involved youth struggling with substance misuse.

- **#192552 - Bronx Community Justice Center In-She-Spire - \$100,000**

#### **Young Women's Leadership Development (New)**

**Description:** The Bronx Community Justice Center's Project In-She-Spire works to create a safe, empowering, and nurturing environment designed to address the unique needs of young women, femmes, and gender-expansive individuals between the ages of 14 and 24. In the South Bronx, girls encounter a distinct set of challenges, resulting in fractured community bonds, overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, and involvement in gangs. Project In-She-Spire is dedicated to fostering meaningful social connections among these young women and gender-expansive youth, with the aim of fostering positive development, strengthening resilience, and boosting self-esteem. Project In-She-Spire's goal is to provide participants with the vital skills and resources needed to navigate systemic obstacles and overcome adversity, ultimately building a brighter future.

#### **Brooklyn Mental Health Court**

- **#192513 - Brooklyn Mental Health Court Court-Involved Youth Mental Health - \$150,000**

#### **Court Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal)**

**Description:** The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health initiative of Brooklyn Mental Health Court provides specialized support to youth ages 18 to 24, who have unique social and cognitive needs and who represent a growing percentage of the cases we serve. Since 2017, more than 191 youth in this age range have been served by Brooklyn Mental Health Court. Thanks to City Council support, we hired a new dedicated Youth Engagement Social worker who leads youth programming and fosters close relationships



with our participants. Renewed funding will enable us to continue and strengthen our youth-focused programs, provide meaningful activities and healthy meals and snacks to our participants, continue essential training for staff, and maintain our critical Youth Engagement Social Worker.

### **Brownsville Community Justice Center**

- **#192523 - Brownsville Community Justice Center Brownsville Girls Collaborative - \$150,000**

#### **Young Women's Leadership Development (Renewal)**

**Description:** The Brownsville Girls Collaborative (BGC), a cornerstone of programming at the Brownsville Community Justice Center, is a leadership development program focused on the holistic empowerment of young women in the community. The program creates a safe space for young women from Brownsville, who are at high risk of violence or justice involvement, to engage with Justice Center staff, facilitators, and one another. Throughout the year, the Justice Center will work with BGC participants to address the root causes of trauma, violence, and risk behaviors to reduce justice system contact and develop participants into positive actors within the Brownsville community.

### **Queens Community Justice Center**

- **#190772 - Queens Community Justice Center UPLIFT - \$100,000**

#### **Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations (Renewal);**

#### **Court-Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal);**

#### **Speaker's Initiative (Renewal);**

#### **Community Safety and Victims Services**

**Description:** To address the high levels of exposure to community violence and trauma among young men of color in Queens, the Queens Community Justice Center piloted UPLIFT in FY22 with City Council support. Through the pilot, staff provided trauma and healing services to justice-involved young men of color, ages 16-25. Given the program's initial success, the Justice Center was able to fully implement and sustain the program, thanks to the ongoing support of City Council. By offering client-driven individual therapeutic sessions and supportive group workshops, case management and victim services assistance, and advocacy and mentoring, UPLIFT participants are supported to recognize, process, and heal their own trauma, resulting in better life outcomes. This year, the Justice Center requests funding to continue UPLIFT's critical work through the following initiatives: Court-Involved Youth Mental Health, Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations, Community Safety and Victim Services, and Speaker's Initiative.

- **#190938 - Queens Community Justice Center Queens HOPE - \$75,000**

#### **Domestic Violence and Empowerment (Renewal)**

**Description:** The Queens Community Justice Center seeks funding from City Council's Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative for its Queens HOPE (Heal, Overcome, Prosper, Empower) program. Queens HOPE aims to provide client-centered and trauma-informed advocacy, counseling, victim services, and case management to young people up to and including 25 years old who have experienced, or are vulnerable to sex and/or labor exploitation. A social worker and mentor work one-on-one and in a group setting with referred youth, providing intensive case management and trauma-informed, survivor-centered support services, including mentoring. Queens HOPE staff also provides training/professional development and support to court stakeholders and community partners to build their capacity to identify and provide services to girls and young women who are at risk of, or are victims of, sex and/or labor trafficking.

#### **The RISE Project**

- **#191278 - RISE Project IPV Community Intervention - \$150,000**

#### **Domestic Violence and Empowerment (Renewal/Expansion)**

**Description:** This is an application for continued support of the RISE Project. RISE is a part of New York City's Crisis Management System, working in partnership with Cure Violence sites to provide community-based intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention services to individuals at risk of being impacted by gun violence in communities most impacted. RISE works to reduce IPV by engaging individuals who are causing abuse in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior, change community norms to reduce tolerance for IPV, train credible messengers to identify risk factors for IPV, build skills to talk about IPV, and connect community members in need of services to RISE. RISE incorporates components of the Cure Violence and restorative justice models in its work.

#### **Staten Island Community Justice Center**

- **#192670 - Staten Island Community Justice Center Youth Wellness Initiative - \$130,000**

#### **Court-Involved Youth Mental Health (Renewal)**

**Description:** This a renewal proposal for Staten Island Justice Center's Youth Wellness Initiative (YWI), a program providing wrap-around services to court-involved and justice system-impacted youth in Staten Island, ages 12 to 18, to decrease the likelihood of long-term justice involvement and support those who may have unmet mental health

needs. We specifically seek to engage youth who have participated in some form of community harm (such as assault, robbery, or gang violence) or who have experienced community harm such as community violence or violence at home. YWI works to decrease community harm and the likelihood of long-term justice involvement through transformative education, youth-led community engagement, peer support and mentorship, and individual short-term counseling and advocacy. YWI also offers interactive and holistic family resources and support to parents or guardians who may need assistance in caring for their youth while navigating the justice system. Participants will be able to translate their therapeutic encounters into an opportunity to restore themselves back into their communities.



DARCEL D. CLARK

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
BRONX COUNTY

March 6, 2025

Speaker Adrienne Adams  
New York City Council  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the Bronx District Attorney's Office, I am pleased to write this letter in support of key Center for Justice Innovation (formerly, Center for Court Innovation) FY25 City Council Applications. Funding will expand:

- pre-arraignment early diversion options;
- mental health supports;
- restorative justice programming;
- human trafficking survivor leadership initiatives at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence; and
- innovative pilot programs that address pressing needs in communities within the Bronx.

These programs will enable the Bronx to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the legal system wherever possible and allow us to build public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

For the past several years, the City Council has supported the Bronx with **\$710,000** to invest in early system diversion, which includes Project Reset, the Center's citywide pre-arraignment diversion model and same day at arraignments programming that re-directs New Yorkers with misdemeanor arrests from the court system. Project Reset Bronx includes borough-wide restorative justice circles to aid in diversion. This has offered relief from the collateral consequence's participants might otherwise experience if arraigned for low-level crimes. We support the Center's continuing to partner with the Council to implement the next generation of early system diversions for the Bronx to continue to lead the City in scaled restorative justice-based interventions.

The Bronx County District Attorney's Office partners with the **Bronx Child Trauma Support** program to support clinical assessment and treatment of child victims and witnesses to crimes in the Bronx. The continued support of the Council will baseline these direct services conducted through evidenced-based and trauma-informed intervention models designed to prevent or reduce post-traumatic stress symptoms, suicidality, re-traumatization, and future victimization.

Thanks to meaningful changes in the treatment of trafficking victims in the justice system, the Center's Bronx Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC) referrals continue to decline. **Project Healing and Empowerment through Advocacy and Leadership** (Project HEAL) is a survivor leadership and peer support initiative for human trafficking survivors. Additionally, we support the Center's RISE Project which is used in Family Court and provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence.

Since 2010, Bronx Community Solutions (BCS) has assisted all individuals ordered by court mandate to complete a screening and assessment, **DWI treatment**, and enrollment in the **Driver Accountability Program**. This initiative began at the request of the judiciary, who noted that participants were having difficulty navigating the complicated network of private providers of these statutorily mandated services.

Finally, we support continuation of the **Center's Innovative Core Funding** which addresses the immediate needs of all borough residents by piloting novel and effective approaches to anti-gun violence, victim services, mental health integrations to diversion.

The Center has a long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in the Bronx. Their mission to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities aligns with my Office's vision. Together we can reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice. We can do this by reducing incarceration as well as by building substantial and meaningful community-based support. I encourage the City Council to consider funding each of the Center's programs which will ultimately enhance fairness, accountability, and safety for the people of the Bronx.

Sincerely,



Darcel Clark





OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
RICHMOND COUNTY  
MICHAEL E. McMAHON  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

February 28, 2025

Honorable Adrienne Adams  
New York City Council  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Support for Center for Justice Innovation Fiscal Year 2026 Initiatives**

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of the New York City Council:

I am pleased to offer my support to the Center for Justice Innovation's application to expand alternatives to incarceration opportunities and to provide mental health support, early diversion programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence, restorative re-entry options for individuals and their families, pre-court eviction prevention options, and innovative pilot programs that address pressing needs in communities across the city. Many of these important initiatives and programs will advance Staten Island towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system and build public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

CJI's long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in Staten Island to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities align with my office's vision. My office has proudly partnered with CJI in the development of a **Staten Island Community Justice Center** to reduce crime and incarceration, strengthen community trust in justice, and create safer, more equitable neighborhoods through community-driven public safety initiatives, youth opportunity, and economic mobility efforts. To maintain existing operations and plan for new programming, existing Justice Center staff will dedicate time to the development of new initiatives and activities including data collection and evaluation plans. Together, we reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice, aiming to reduce incarceration and conviction and build substantial and meaningful community-based supports through innovative courts and alternatives to incarceration programming and services. I strongly encourage



investment in each of the programs and areas outlined above to ensure that they can continue this successful work.

I further urge the Council to support **Youth Impact Staten Island**. The Youth Impact program (formerly Youth Court) is a multi-pronged youth leadership development program focused on peer-led mentorship and violence intervention and prevention practices, with a goal to keep young people in school and out of the criminal legal system, while inspiring community safety and healing from a youth-centered perspective. The program primarily uses a restorative justice model through structured in-school violence intervention partnerships and organized civic engagement. Participants develop hard skills including in oral and written communication, facilitation, conflict resolution and research processes; learn the impact and infrastructure of the justice system; and are trained in community planning and organizing.

Individuals demonstrating persistent and untreated mental illness require access to culturally competent mental health treatment. To address gaps in mental health-related support for court-involved youth in Staten Island, I urge the Council to continue and expand support for the Staten Island Justice Center's **Youth Wellness Initiative**. This initiative provides vital mental health services that address trauma and promote healing for young people on Staten Island involved in the justice system or at-risk of justice system involvement. Additionally, the initiative is geared towards providing holistic support to families by supporting the parents and caretakers of youth enrolled in the initiative.

To address the issue of street safety, I support the continuation and expansion of the Center's **Driver Accountability Program** to provide a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving and work to change the risky driving behavior of people charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court. The Driver Accountability Program is also addressing more serious cases through a second tier of programming, Circles for Safe Streets, which brings together drivers and their victims through a restorative justice process.

I also urge the Council to continue supporting **CJI's RISE Project**, which provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence. RISE works to reduce intimate partner violence by engaging individuals who are causing abuse in voluntary programming to stop violence and change behavior, changing community norms to reduce the tolerance for violence, and training credible messengers to identify risk factors for intimate partner violence.

The Council should continue and expand support for **CJI's Innovative Core Funding**. CJI uses this funding to respond to the immediate needs of Staten Island residents by piloting novel and effective approaches to anti-gun violence, providing victim services, mental health integrations to diversion, and other pilots to test for scalable solutions.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this letter as you make important financial determinations on behalf of the City of New York.



If you have questions, please contact Agency Chief Contracting Officer and Grants Coordinator, Dr. Lisa Sloan, via telephone at (718) 556-7089 or via email at [Lisa.Sloan@rcda.nyc.gov](mailto:Lisa.Sloan@rcda.nyc.gov).

Sincerely,



Michael E. McMahon  
District Attorney

MEM/aem

Good afternoon, members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

My name is Chanya Holness, and I am the Senior Coordinator for Policy & Advocacy for the Children's Health Fund (CHF).

Today, I will be speaking about the importance of continued and increased funding for programming that critically supports schools and parents in ensuring that students are well positioned to thrive in schools like our New York City Council-funded program, Healthy and Ready to Learn (HRL).

HRL was developed by Children's Health Fund in 2014 as a part of our mission of supporting kids so they can thrive. It was developed recognizing the importance of education in helping kids to reach their potential, and that they need to be their healthiest selves to take advantage of educational opportunities. The program is designed to help schools identify and address health barriers (many rooted in social, racial, and economic inequities) that impact student learning. When students have their health needs met (ie., can see the board, hear their teacher, focus on schoolwork, and so on) they are more likely to learn and succeed in school; ultimately, translating into a greater likelihood of a productive and happy life. HRL started with a strong focus on screening and responding to what we call health barriers to learning, such as addressing medical issues like asthma, dental concerns, vision problems, and mental well-being. While we continue to address these health barriers to learning, we are focused more and more on a growing and worrisome need: childhood trauma. HRL, therefore, has evolved to include supporting trauma-sensitive school and home environments to better address the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and surrounding social issues like increases in overt racism and Violence.

Through our current model, we leverage findings from our flagship school, PS 49 in the Bronx and in Councilwoman Diana Ayala's district (D-8), to inform materials and trainings that we conduct with educators, administrators, and parents citywide and through our Resource and Training Center (RTC). Launched in 2017, RTC is an online platform that enables Children's Health Fund to scale our impact to reach students throughout New York City. Our online repository is equity and diversity-focused and houses a broad library that includes infographics, fact sheets, interactive learning images, slide decks, and external resource links. Here is a snapshot of RTC's and HRL's impact:

- Since 2017, nearly 52,000 users have accessed the website to request training curricula, view recorded workshops, and download free materials to support their health and education work.
- In FY 2024, our most recent, complete NYCC grant year, the RTC had 7,893 users.
- From January 2024 to the present, we trained in 23 schools in 18 districts—delivering 58 parent workshops, 14 student workshops, and 2 professional development workshops—reaching 1,776 individuals.

Our impact is clear and the demand for our programming continues to increase. To meet the growing need in our most vulnerable communities, our FY26 goals include the following:

- HRL will expand its reach by delivering workshops to at least three organizations supporting unstably housed children, those in transitional housing, and recent immigrants. By training community partners and expanding into shelters, we will strengthen support for Students on Temporary Housing (STH) social workers, ensuring more families receive critical assistance.
- Enhance early childhood programming, including:
  - A year-long curriculum for 3K and Pre-K educators and caregivers focused on school readiness, early childhood development, and caregiver wellness.
  - A new early childhood curriculum for Head Start educators, staff, and families.
- Develop tailored support for immigrant families, including:
  - One professional development training, one parent workshop, and an online resource to help newly arrived families adjust to NYC public schools.
  - Translating 10 key HRL resources into a third language beyond English and Spanish.
- Support educator well-being by creating four new workshops focused on burnout prevention and self-care.
- We will expand professional training opportunities, including free, in-person, and virtual Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE)-eligible training for school communities. As we grow in this space, we plan to offer five professional development sessions to support educators with the tools to create healthy, nurturing learning environments that foster development and well-being.
- Increase HRL's visibility through:
  - 12 newsletters, 4 infographics, and 1 new web resource to reach NYC school communities.
- Extend services to 10 schools, including early childhood centers and community organizations, with the final number depending on funding and feasibility.

For these reasons, Children's Health Fund urges the New York City Council and the Mayor to include funding to secure critical investments for early childhood learning, mental health programming, and our Healthy and Ready to Learn initiative. These actions will expand access for thousands more students throughout the city, giving them the best chance of succeeding in school and life.



**Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 20, 2025**

Chair Stevens and Committee Members:

Since 1995, Children's Rights has been a national advocate for youth in state systems. We are also a member of the New York City Jails Action Coalition. Our experience with adolescents and young adults in foster care and juvenile legal systems often brings us into contact with young adult and youth corrections policy, as our clients are disproportionately represented in young adult and juvenile correction facilities. We advocate on behalf of young adults, 18- to 21-years old, incarcerated on Rikers Island.

Rikers Island is no place for young adults. There are currently 1,349 people under 26 years old on the Island—that's almost 20% of the population.<sup>1</sup> We must invest in our children and our communities, not continue to throw money at the humanitarian disaster that is Rikers Island.

We call on the Council to ensure our communities have adequate supportive and affordable housing, mental health care, and other critical services *before* New Yorkers interact with the criminal legal system. This is especially critical for our children and youth. Evidence shows that incarceration reduces youth's success in education and employment, and also leads to lasting damage to their health and well-being.<sup>2</sup> Evidence also shows that alternatives to incarceration lead to better outcomes for youth and adolescents, all while costing far less than incarceration.<sup>3</sup> Underfunding alternatives to confinement and re-entry services makes no sense morally, ethically, or fiscally.

We urge this Committee and the Council to cut the Department of Correction budget and redistribute funding to programs that actually work to help youth and families. We also urge you to reverse the cuts to the Board of Correction to provide the resources for meaningful oversight of the City's jails.

New York City operates both the most excessively-funded and over-staffed jail system in the country—with the worst results. The City now spends over \$500,000 per incarcerated person per year.<sup>4</sup> It runs the only jail system among the nation's 50 largest cities that has more officers than

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vera.org/ny-data-hub/jail> (last visited 3/18/2025).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/ensuring-timely-trials/>. The most recent available data show that more than 78% of incarcerated persons on Rikers are there pre-trial, more than half have mental health conditions, and over 84% are people of color. <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/> Hundreds of people languish on Rikers every day simply because they are homeless. <https://nysfocus.com/2022/01/03/he-was-homeless-so-the-judge-kept-him-at-rikers/>.

people in custody.<sup>5</sup> Despite the enormous sums poured into the City's jails, however, countless reports show that detainees are subjected to some of the most dangerous, degrading, and inhumane conditions in the country. This includes shackling young adults to desks during their out-of-cell time.

We need look no further than the *Nunez* monitor's regular reports and the February 28, 2024 report filed in *Benjamin v. Molina* detailing vermin infestation and sanitary violations on Rikers.<sup>6</sup> Serving time on Rikers can also be a death sentence: since Mayor Adams took office, 35 incarcerated people have lost their lives while in Department custody.<sup>7</sup>

Please include in the Council's priorities the following:

- At least an additional \$39.8M to meet housing and mental health needs, and to fulfill commitments in the Close Rikers plan, including the following funding for specific programs:
  - \$4.8 million more in annual funding for Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), and reissue the RFP for 380 new units with service funding levels in line with those of similar supportive housing programs. This will enable the City to deliver on the Close Rikers Points of Agreement to expand JISH to 500 units.
  - \$22 million more to create 15 more Intensive Mobile Treatment teams. The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people.
  - \$7 million more to create more Forensic Assertive Community Treatment teams and cut the long wait times (average of six to 12 months) to access this service.
  - \$6 million more to open four new crisis respite centers, in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.
- Full restoration of cuts to the Office of Criminal Justice for alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) (\$3.8 million) and re-entry (\$8 million) programs. The budget should also go further, and increase discretionary funding for ATIs by \$2.4 million to support the scaling of ATIs citywide.
- Full restoration of cuts to the Board of Correction and increase its headcount to at least 1% of the number of people in DOC custody.<sup>8</sup> The preliminary budget proposes

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<sup>5</sup> DOC Fact Sheet: Staffing and Efforts to Improve Conditions; <https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://tillidgroup.com/projects/nunez-monitorship/>; <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-rikers-island-report-reveals-graphic-details-about-unsanitary-conditions-fire-safety-and-ventilation-systems/>; [https://nyp1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/01/11/detainees-request-clean-laundry--report-unsanitary-conditions-on-rikers#:~:text=%22They%20don%27t%20have%20soap,%2C%20to%20wash%20their%20clothes.%22;see also](https://nyp1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/01/11/detainees-request-clean-laundry--report-unsanitary-conditions-on-rikers#:~:text=%22They%20don%27t%20have%20soap,%2C%20to%20wash%20their%20clothes.%22;see%20also) <https://centerforjustice.columbia.edu/news/new-report-solitary-many-other-names-report-persistent-and-pervasive-use-solitary-confinement>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vera.org/news/nyc-jail-deaths>; the most recent person to die in DOC custody was Terrence Moore on February 24, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> The FY2026 projected budget allocates \$3.6 million to BOC, for 30 staff; 67 staff would constitute less than 1% of the current jail population (7,069 people).

\$210,000 in cuts and five fewer staff positions at BOC, when more oversight, not less, of the jails on Rikers is sorely needed.

If the City eliminated the more than 1,100 current vacant positions for uniformed correction officers, taxpayers could save almost \$150 million next year *alone* to reinvest in the programs and services listed above—programs that create real community safety and well-being.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the investments we recommend will help the City close Rikers by August 31, 2027 in accordance with the law.

Negotiating these essential changes to the proposed budget provides an opportunity for the Council to move the City in the right direction, while also rightsizing the expenditure of taxpayer dollars. Instead of allocating \$2.87 billion to the Department of Correction as the Mayor has proposed,<sup>10</sup> the Council should negotiate a fair, just, and reasonable budget that serves all New Yorkers, including our children and youth, incarcerated or not.

Especially in the face of the federal government's rampage against the most vulnerable among us, we look to the City Council to do right by all New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical issue.

Respectfully,



Daniele Gerard  
Senior Staff Attorney  
dgerard@childrensrights.org

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<sup>9</sup> <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/A-Look-Inside-the-New-York-City-Fiscal-Year-2026-Preliminary-Budget.pdf>.



**Chinese-American Planning Council  
Testimony Before the Committee on Children and Youth  
Chair, Council Member Althea Stevens  
March 20th, 2025**

Thank you Chair Stevens and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of CPC is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

Last year, 1,003 students participated in our programs, and we proudly saw 100% of our high school seniors graduate. This success is not just a statistic; it's a testament to the transformative power of community-based programs. For low-income, first-generation college students, these programs provide a lifeline to academic success and personal growth. They offer more than just an opportunity for educational enrichment—they create pathways for a brighter future.

Funding for community-driven programs like ours is not just important—it is life-changing. It is critical to the success of students who are often overlooked in traditional educational settings. Our programs offer more than afterschool care—they provide mentorship, access to resources, and a nurturing environment where students can thrive both academically and personally. For many of these young people, especially those from low-income backgrounds or immigrant families, these programs represent their best shot at economic mobility and long-term success.

For two years, CPC served 200 students annually without a dedicated office space at the Lafayette Educational Complex in Brooklyn, which houses five public high schools. Our staff worked tirelessly to provide support with limited resources. Despite these challenges, we remained committed to serving our community's youth. That changed in March 2024, when one of the five schools offered us a small but private office space. This space has been transformative—not only for our staff, but also for our students. Now, they have a safe and welcoming place to stop by each day. It is a space where they can receive academic and emotional support, engage with afterschool programming, and feel part of a community that believes in their potential. The power of having this dedicated space cannot be overstated. It has made it easier for us to build relationships with students, keep them engaged, and offer critical resources to support their educational journey.





The impact of afterschool programming extends beyond the classroom. These programs give students the tools they need to succeed not just academically, but also professionally. They gain valuable skills, increase their social capital, and, most importantly, they begin to see themselves as future leaders and contributors to society. It's imperative that these types of programs receive continued and expanded funding to help young people succeed, regardless of their immigration status or socioeconomic background.

We urge the City to expand funding for essential programs like SYEP, WLJ, PATHWAY, Learn & Earn, and Summer Rising. These programs play a crucial role in ensuring that young people have the necessary tools to enter the workforce, pursue higher education, and achieve economic independence. They provide youth with opportunities for job experience, career development, and mentorship, which are invaluable as they navigate their futures.

Every young person deserves the chance to dream big, to access the resources they need, and to build a better future for themselves and their families. With the right support, we can ensure that all students, especially those in underserved communities, have the opportunities and resources they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time, and for allowing us the opportunity to speak on the issues that deeply impact our communities.

If there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy Analyst at [achen9@cpc-nyc.org](mailto:achen9@cpc-nyc.org).



**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti, Senior Policy and Advocacy Associate  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Submitted to the New York City Council FY'2026 Preliminary Budget Oversight Hearing  
Children and Youth Services Committee  
March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Stevens and all the members of the City Council Children and Youth Committee for holding today's important hearing on the Mayor's FY26 Preliminary Budget. Below we include recommendations for how our City can improve access to youth programming and family services that are essential for supporting youth development and professional opportunities, economic security and community networks.

**Invest in Youth Opportunity, Youth Services, and Workforce Development**

We believe every New York child deserves access to enriching, engaging, and high-quality afterschool programming. COMPASS and SONYC programs can offer art and culture, sports, experiential learning and academic support essential to children's social-emotional development, health and wellness, and academic success across age ranges. These programs are also a lifeline for working parents who deeply value having their children engaged in programming while they are at work.

Unfortunately, SONYC and COMPASS have both been deeply underfunded for years. Providers are being asked by the Department of Youth and Community Development to sign contract extensions that continue to perpetuate deeply inadequate rates that undervalue the workforce and further destabilize the afterschool system.

**CCC, in partnership with the Campaign for Children, urges the City to raise rates for COMPASS and SONYC providers, beginning with a phase in process of a halfway increase of base rates for COMPASS Elementary to \$4900, and for SONYC middle school programs to \$4150. The end goal must be fully funding elementary and middle school programs in a new procurement in FY27.** This change would greatly improve the lives of providers and will also ensure programs are well resourced and robust for youth.

Moreover, we are concerned about the delayed release of the RFP for COMPASS. We urge the City to prioritize the release of the COMPASS concept paper that includes a model budget reflecting the rates referenced above, allowing the RFP process to begin on an equitable foundation.

CCC believes it is essential to provide families with free and affordable, high-quality afterschool options for their children. These options can only be available and sustainable if the City commits to funding COMPASS and SONYC with adequate base rates.

### **Enhance Summer Programming Efficiency**

We are pleased to see the one-year \$19.6 million investment in the Preliminary Budget for Summer Rising. Restoring Summer Rising funding early in the budget cycle allows the City, agencies, and providers to address persistent issues that have plagued the Summer Rising programs. In addition to requesting that this funding be baselined, we urge the City to address the following operational issues to ensure summer programming serves families and youth as effectively as possible:

- **Allow CBOs to control enrollment instead of New York City Public Schools:** Currently, NYCPS's system does not successfully integrate with the program used by DYCD, making it challenging for CBOs to manage enrollment or update waitlists. Returning enrollment control to CBOs will allow them to enroll on-site and manage waitlists directly, thus ensuring available spots are utilized effectively.
- **Inconsistent Paraprofessional Staffing:** The availability of paraprofessionals for the full duration of summer programming remains inconsistent, preventing students with disabilities from having the fun and fulfilling summer with their peers that they deserve.
- **Lack of Clear Communication:** Communication between NYC Public Schools, the Department of Health, and CBOs remains unclear, especially regarding critical staffing needs, background checks, enrollment, and updated regulations. Improved coordination is essential to the smooth operation of summer programs.
- **Relocation of Programs:** Relocating programs to new buildings, especially when CBO staff lack prior relationships, disrupts years of trust and collaboration between CBOs and schools, and can often lead to competition for space with other co-located CBOs. We recommend minimizing relocations and ensuring that adequate time and support are given to both CBOs and NYCPS staff to plan and acclimate to new settings.
- **Flexibility in Scheduling Field Trips:** A key request from our programs is the ability to schedule field trips on days other than Fridays. Allowing Summer Rising programs, the flexibility to schedule trips on various days would enhance the overall summer experience for participants, providing a more dynamic and engaging program.

Finally, we urge the City to implement summer programs that provide greater choice to families. It is inequitable that the only free option available for families requires a summer school model, while many youth and families prefer full-time camp options with more flexible programming. We look forward to collaborating with city leaders to support and expand models that meet the needs of families and provide enriching programming for youth.

### **Enhance Services for Systems-Involved Youth and Families**

#### **Ensure Transportation for Youth in Foster Care**

While both federal and state law require the City to provide transportation to students in foster care so they can remain in their original schools, the DOE currently does not guarantee any form of transportation to these students. This is causing deeply harmful disruptions for students in foster care, including forcing them to transfer schools or foster homes to access an education.

Being in foster care is disruptive enough for a young person; the DOE must do everything in its power to ensure that students in foster care are supported and, at the bare minimum, can get to school. During the 2019-20 school year, one in five NYC students had to change schools upon their initial placement in foster care. As of April 2022, students in foster care had an attendance rate of 79% and had missed roughly 7 weeks of school.<sup>1</sup> Without sustainable transportation, students cannot get to their schools. **We therefore ask the City Council to ensure that the budget includes \$5 million for the DOE to provide bus service or other door-to-door transportation to the relatively small number of students in foster care who need it to maintain school stability.**

### **Restore Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Supportive Programming for Youth and Young Adults**

Extensive research demonstrates the positive impacts of ATI and reentry programs, including lowering recidivism and crime.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, for every dollar invested in ATI programs, studies estimate between \$3.46-\$5.54 in returns, in addition to reduced costs for the criminal justice system and better community health outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the well-established benefits of these programs, since 2023 the City Administration has cut nearly \$6 million from probation programs that have proven to be successful in supporting re-entry and connecting young people to mentorship and services. Failing to provide robust reentry services or supportive probation programs will harm our youth and is counterintuitive to building safe communities.

We therefore recommend the following investments and restorations in the FY26 Budget:

- **Restore and baseline** \$3.3 million to the IMPACT program, an alternative to placement program for young people who would otherwise be sent to Horizons or Crossroads
- **Restore and baseline** \$2.6 million for Next STEPS (cut August 2023), which offered one-on-one and group mentoring within a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum designed to help young adults make the attitudinal and behavioral changes necessary to avoid criminal activity and re-engage with education, work and community
- **Restore and baseline** the \$3.8 million cut to the Office of Criminal Justice for Alternative to Incarceration programs
- **Restore and baseline** \$8 million for reentry programs

### **Deepen Investments in the Runaway and Homeless Youth System**

Numerous challenges currently face Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in New York. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is mainly responsible for supporting this population; however, it is not uncommon for RHY to also be involved with ACS, DHS, and HRA in the efforts to find housing or social services. We must ensure that Runaway and Homeless Youth have access to more beds and more support. Since youth do not have a right to shelter and DYCD does not have enough beds for young people (especially older youth), many young people are driven onto the streets or into dangerous living situations. **We therefore urge the City to increase the rates for providers, which have not been updated since 2017, to \$70,000 per bed.** This investment will provide safe, temporary housing for youth who otherwise would be without a stable option.

Furthermore, we also urge the city to **restore and baseline \$1.62 million to maintain funding for the Peer Navigator positions and \$1.5 million for the 16 housing specialists in the DYCD-RHY System.** The housing and youth services systems are complex and convoluted, and it is critical to have a trusted support person to offer advice, resources, and answers for young people.

Additionally, we echo the calls of the Runaway and Homeless Youth providers on the following investments to support this population of young people:

- Baseline \$1.03 million for Street Outreach and Drop-in Centers
- Invest \$1.63 million to support services for newly arriving youth and unaccompanied minors
- Invest \$625,000 for Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services
- Invest \$2.6 million for two Mental Health-Focused Transitional Independent Living Pilots. To address the significant mental health needs of RHY, we propose funding two pilot programs that include on-site clinical services and intensive case management. These programs will offer the specialized care necessary to stabilize youth with complex mental health challenges.

### **Invest in Child Welfare Primary Prevention and Workforce Stability**

Fundamental to preventing child welfare involvement is investing in the primary prevention supports families need to be safe and secure, including housing, child care, healthy food, and economic supports. At the same time, the prevention workforce currently in place to support families is in crisis. To help ensure that prevention services can best serve children and families, we recommend the following:

- Enhance child welfare prevention contract flexibility to allow providers the ability to aptly respond to different family circumstances
- Invest in salary increases, scholarships and tuition assistance to help agencies sustain a highly trained and credentialed child welfare workforce.
- Ensure that child welfare staff are paid competitive salaries and agencies are paid the true cost of services on prevention contracts.
- Reform the current NYC procurement system to ensure timely payments to contracted agencies.

### **Support Families in Need of Child Care**

Promise NYC provides childcare assistance to low-income families who may be ineligible for other, federally funded subsidized childcare. We are grateful that last year the City Council ensured that Promise NYC funding was restored and increased to \$25 million for one year funding. We must ensure that this vital program is not eliminated. All parents want a safe, high-quality, and culturally responsive place for their children to learn, and Promise NYC provides this option. **We strongly urge city leaders to restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC to ensure that all families can access child care.**

### **Supporting Critical State Investments**

#### **Address the CCBG Funding Cliff That Threatens Child Care Assistance for Thousands of New York City Families**

In recent years, New York City and other counties have significantly expanded the number of children receiving child care assistance, and have used the Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) to fund this enhanced access. CCBG funds are used to provide child care assistance to families on cash assistance; contracted

child care for children 0-2 years old and 3-and 4-year-olds in extended day/year; and child care vouchers for low-income families engaged in work, training or other qualified activities.

In February 2025, New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) shared that the state Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) funds will be exhausted as early as summer 2025. This is due to a combination of significant and targeted increases in child care assistance uptake; increased market rates; and the re-institution of engagement requirements for families on cash assistance, which will increase the demand for child care assistance as parents return to work and training activities. Between June 2022 and February 2025, the number of children using low-income child care vouchers in NYC increased by over 700%.

Ultimately, the City estimates that without additional funding, thousands of families will lose child care access. As families' eligibility ends, each month 4,000-7,000 children would lose child care assistance, as the City would have insufficient funds to recertify their care. This threatens to destabilize the provider system and deny thousands of families affordable and safe child care options.

ACS has stated that New York City will need an estimated \$2.006 billion included in the FY 2026 New York State budget for the City's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in order to continue to serve the same number of children moving forward. This includes an additional \$127M for FFY25 and a total of \$1.879B for FFY26 (about \$860M above the Governor's commitment) to maintain child care assistance for low-income families at the level to which NYC has expanded.

The Assembly One House budget proposal did include \$212.5 million in additional funding for CCAP, with New York City likely receiving about 61% of this increase according to ACS. Even though this increase will help reduce the deficit, it is not enough to ensure all current families will maintain child care. **We urge City leaders to work with the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that New York City has the necessary funding to prevent the loss of essential child care voucher access.**

### **Raise the Age Waiver of Hardship**

Last fall marked six years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Prior to the passing of this legislation, thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked-out of age-appropriate services in family court programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses.<sup>1</sup> Evidence from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by

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<sup>1</sup> In NYC, there was a decline of 77% in total arrests, and a decline of 48% in Index Crimes for youth under the age of 18. Data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services: Juvenile Arrests (Non-NYC) 2013-2022; Analysis of New York City Police Department data by Citizens Committee for Children of New York for 2013-2022. On file with the author.

state law. However, it is possible to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our city and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. New York City accounts for half of the state's youth justice system population and should be able to access more funding. However, Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's claim that the current fiscal cliff necessitates drastic cuts to many of the supportive services and programs that are vital to New York City's youth and families.

It is critical to invest in programs and organizations that are serving our communities through youth development, violence-prevention services, and other alternatives to incarceration to prevent the necessity of further investment in the carceral system. We therefore urge the Council to work with the Mayor and the Administration to submit a letter with the waiver of hardship to allow NYC to be considered for the funding. This would be beneficial for young people and community-based organizations offering these services alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.





Leadership, voice and vision for child welfare in New York State

**Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies**

**Written Testimony Submitted by:  
Dr. Sophie Charles  
Associate Executive Director, Downstate**

**New York City Council  
Committee on Children and Youth  
Budget Hearing  
Thursday, March 20, 2025**

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) is the principal representative for nearly all the not-for-profit organizations providing foster care, adoption, family preservation, and juvenile justices services in New York State. COFCCA is comprised of over 100-member organizations, ranging in size from small community-based programs to the nation's largest multi-service agencies – all of which share the mission of serving children and families. More than 50 of our member agencies are contracted by the NYC Administration of Children's Services to provide child welfare services across the 5 boroughs of New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony at the Committee on Children and Youth Budget Hearing. In this testimony, we highlight a number of budget priorities: 1) Workforce & Staffing; 2) Procurement Challenges; 3) Underfunded Prevention Contracts, 4) Liability Insurance for Child Welfare Foster Care Providers, and 5) Community-based Aftercare Services for Youths.

### **Workforce & Staffing**

Staffing is the lifeline of all foster care programs and can impact the quality of services and the length of stay for children in care. Without the ability to recruit and pay staff market rates with government dollars, agencies are not able to maintain program utilization or attain service targets (reunification, family, adoptions, kinship placements, etc.). Child welfare staff and case managers are essential workers who form the safety net that keep children safe, they must be paid a living wage to continue to drive positive outcomes for children and families.

- **Pay Parity** - Agencies continue to experience high staff turnover and carry unusually high vacancy rates. For example, according to data gathered by COFCCA for our Workforce Compensation Report, in 2022, there was a 47% average turnover for NYC prevention caseworkers and a 22% average vacancy rate.<sup>1</sup> Current prevention budgets bound providers to pay very low salaries. Providers cannot compete with government and private employers who pay caseworkers significantly more than nonprofits in starting salaries with better fringe benefits.
  - **Staff Turnover** – Agencies invest a huge amount of money into onboarding, training and developing new workers to prepare staff to work with children and families. Too often, newly trained staff leave after 2 years for higher paying government jobs. Nonprofit child welfare organizations become training grounds as they watch their investments walk out the door. Providers need additional resources to recruit, hire, and retain a highly qualified workforce.
  - **Career Development Support** – Child welfare staff need workforce supports to increase career development opportunities. Child welfare staff tell us that in addition to salary increases, they need support with scholarships, tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to achieve higher educational goals. The low salaries make it impossible for licensed mental health staff to continue their education and pay off student loans.
- **COFCCA urges the Council to elevate the importance of staff and their value by investing in salary increases, scholarships and tuition assistance to help agencies sustain a highly trained and credentialed child welfare workforce.**

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<sup>1</sup> Workforce Comp One-Pager for NYC.docx

## **Procurement Challenges**

COFCCA convenes various meetings with Human Services Providers and they often share program priorities and concerns with us. Procurement and contract related challenges are always at the top of the list. Providers are continuously plagued by procurement and contract issues that interrupt program operations. This includes issues related to contract registrations, invoicing, budget modifications, and problems with the PASSport system. Some of their concerns are serious enough to threaten program operations and/or negatively impact services to children and families. A few of those concerns are highlighted below.

### **Delayed and Delinquent Payments**

- Late payments to contracted agencies significantly impact the delivery of services and cause major problems for human services organizations. Delayed payments result in struggles to keep agency doors open, operate programs, and to meet payroll. <sup>2</sup>
  - According to the Human Services Coalition, 90% of nonprofits report delayed payments totaling \$365 million dollars, making it almost impossible to sustain fully operational programs. <sup>3</sup>
  - Providers are often forced to obtain and use lines of credit to maintain program operations, only to pay interest on the loan without a way to recoup fees for interests, thereby, subsidizing city contracts.
- **COFCCA urges the Council to engage support actions to reform the current NYC procurement system to ensure timely payments to contracted agencies.**

### **Underfunded Prevention Contracts**

The successful reduction in foster care placements in NYC would not be possible without prevention services. Prevention programs make it possible for more children to remain safely in their homes and out of foster care placement. In 2025, an ACS prevention family survey showed positive experiences and strong satisfactions with prevention services <sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, the resources and funding from the reduced foster care census have not resulted in additional dollars to support the wide range of services offered by prevention programs.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/11/26/nonprofit-debt-layoffs-passport/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/111924\\_HSC-City-Procurement-Survey-Results.pdf](https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/111924_HSC-City-Procurement-Survey-Results.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/PressReleases/2025/family-experience-survey-2024.pdf>

- Contracted prevention services agencies are almost 5 years into a 9-year prevention contract and they do not see a clear pathway to continued efficient and effective service delivery with the current fiscal deficits that are expected to become even more unmanageable over the life of the contract. Large and small agencies have the same fixed costs and they need to be able to maintain staffing levels, serve families, and sustain slot utilization. Without an increase in baseline salaries of BA level staff and the ability to address compression matters - prevention programs will continually experience difficulty in hiring staff and having adequate capacity to serve families.
- The ACS prevention budgets (and the underlying budget approval, invoice and modification processes) do not allow agencies to respond to drastic changes in the labor market over the last few years. Market rate salaries for human services professionals are on the rise, and providers are in direct competition not only with public sector employers like ACS and DOE, but also with private sector employers offering greater flexibility around remote work, telehealth, and scheduling. The salaries providers are offering are too low to consistently fill positions, so those slots go vacant and the dollars go unspent. It may seem counterintuitive to claim that the contracts are underfunded when money is left unspent, however, the fact that providers are forced to offer below market salaries creates this illusion. If providers were able to hire at competitive salaries, they would be better able to retain staff, staff vacancies would drop, and providers would be better positioned to serve more families.
- **COFCCA encourages the Council to act to ensure that child welfare staff are paid competitive salaries and agencies are paid the true cost of services on prevention contracts.**
- **COFCCA strongly urges the Council to act to ensure the sustainability of the existing robust prevention services system as a safe alternative and practical option to foster placement.**

### **Agency Priorities & Concerns**

#### **Obtaining and Affording Liability Insurance for Foster Care Programs**

Nonprofit child welfare organizations must be able to access, obtain, and pay for liability insurance in order to provide foster care services. Foster care agencies are required per their contracts to carry certain levels of commercial general liability insurance, professional liability insurance, and, depending on the county requirements—potentially excess umbrella liability coverage. Due to social inflation and increasing pressures in the insurance market specifically related to foster care, agencies in NYS and nationwide are experiencing significant challenges in accessing coverage. If an agency is successful in accessing coverage, they are typically experiencing significant cost increases.

- Agencies do not have the resources to pay for these increased costs, and the programs' funding methodology (the Maximum State Aid Rate or MSAR, a state-set administrative rate) does not allow for capturing these significant increases from year to year. In January 2025, a major insurer of foster care programs insuring at least 17% of programs in New York currently, the

Nonprofits Insurance Alliance, wrote an update to all of their insured agencies nationwide, stating that effective April 1, 2025 (though reserving the right to do so beforehand) they will not renew umbrella coverage including Improper Sexual Conduct & Physical Abuse (ISCPA), and Social Services Professional coverage for any of their insured foster family agencies nationwide <sup>5</sup>. If unaddressed, this issue may prevent our member Voluntary Foster Care Agencies here in New York from being able to legally serve children in foster care if they are not able to secure or to pay for adequate liability insurance.

- If nonprofit providers (which currently provide care for all of the children and youth in foster care in New York City) cannot provide foster care, the responsibility for the provision of foster care services will shift to the city. Children and youth in foster care are in the care and custody of New York State, and the voluntary foster care agencies are the primary provider of care for children and youth in foster care. This is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. There are very few insurance providers in this sector already, and we have seen the field become smaller in recent months.
- **COFCCA urges the Council to work with the State by engaging in current discussions designed to assist foster care agencies with insurance access and affordability issues by creating a risk pool, or other permanent mechanism to stabilize the insurance market, specifically, for not-for-profit child welfare agencies providing foster care in NYC.**

### **Youth Justice Fund**

NYS Senators Cleare and Solages have introduced legislation for a **Youth Justice Innovation Fund A767 (Solages) / S643 (Cleare)**. <sup>6</sup> The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would direct \$50 million to **community-based organizations to provide a continuum of services** from prevention, early intervention, to alternatives to detention, placement and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25. The Innovation Fund builds on successful state-wide efforts like Project RISE, which has brought over \$30 million to communities to combat gun violence through public health strategies, including credible messenger and violence interruption programs.

- **The Innovation Fund would be administered by New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, making \$50 million available to community-based organizations** most trusted and best-equipped to serve adolescents and young adults through a grant-making program to support young people who are at-risk for or who come into contact with law enforcement. <sup>7</sup> Before this, community-based organizations have accessed state funding for youth justice through county plans, meaning that the fabric of community-based support is vastly different in different parts of the state, based on local politics and priorities.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.citybuzz.co/2024/08/21/california-foster-family-agencies-face-insurance-crisis-as-niac-announces-coverage-nonrenewal/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/16/new-york-raise-the-age-00197473>

<sup>7</sup> [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O1ojrsoMfuBXZXhTf0adzRzWgb\\_nV9RubfrqQN9gvhM/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O1ojrsoMfuBXZXhTf0adzRzWgb_nV9RubfrqQN9gvhM/edit?tab=t.0)

- The Innovation Fund would be available to community-based organizations across New York, including NYC, and groups could apply for state funding directly. The Fund would also break-down current silos in funding that create arbitrary barriers to serving youth in different court systems by supporting programs and services for youth from age 12 through age 25.
- COFCCA supports the Youth Justice Innovation Fund and view this as an opportunity for NYC to receive its share of those funds with the support of the Council. The Youth Justice Innovation Fund could provide approximately \$50 million in unspent Raise the Age funding for community-based wraparound services for youths in foster care.
- **COFCCA encourages the Council to support the Youth Justice Innovation Fund.**

### **Additional Child Welfare Program Concerns**

Child welfare providers are required by contracts to provide special services to children in the areas of transportation to school for children without DOE bus transportation and they must ensure that youth in congregate care have adequate access to community-based aftercare services. Providers struggle with meeting their contractual obligations when they are not reimbursed by DOE and are unable to secure adequate vocational training, educational programs, and other developmental supports.

- **School Transportation** – Agencies are required to secure and pay for private transportation services for children without school bus service to get to school. ACS has an agreement with DOE to reimburse agencies for all private transportation expenditures. DOE is delinquent with reimbursements and agencies are owed hundreds of thousands of dollars for 8-9 months of nonpayment.
- **We urge the Council to urge DOE to honor their commitment to pay the agencies with timely reimbursements.**

**Aftercare Services for Youth** – Agencies are required to connect young people in foster care with community-based Aftercare services (counseling, vocational services, GED, mental health services, employment, and other resources depending upon specific needs. This is a major challenge for Providers, given that such services are scarce or nonexistent in some communities. It is often difficult to find resources in community-based settings – an essential service in the continuum of care to help vulnerable young people transiting out of care.

- **We urge the Council to invest in more community-based programs to ensure that youth have access to mandatory developmental supports.**

In conclusion, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of addressing the needs of children, youth, families, and the nonprofit human services sectors. COFCCA welcomes the opportunity to engage the Council in a conversation to discuss our testimony. We are available to answer any questions or concerns that you may have about child welfare services.

**Sophie Charles, PhD**  
**Associate Executive Director, Downstate**  
**Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies**  
**scharles@cofcca.org**  
**(212) 929-2626, ext. 212**  
**254 West 31 Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10001**



**New York City Council, Children and Youth Committee**

**Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026**

Mar 20, 2025

Good Afternoon, Chair Stevens, New York City Council members, and esteemed colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Dr. Shakeema North-Albert, Chief Executive Officer at Covenant House New York (CHNY), a non-profit adolescent care agency providing housing and support services to youth experiencing homelessness. In FY24, CHNY served over 1,500 young people and provided over 141,000 nights of housing across our residential programs. In addition to crisis, transitional, and long-term housing, our continuum of care includes services to support physical and mental health and wellness, legal services, educational programming, workforce development, and life-skills training, all geared towards assisting young people within the runaway and homeless youth population to achieve stability, independence, and ultimately ending the cycle of homelessness in their lives. 90% of the youth we serve are people of color, nearly 40% identify as LGBTQ, approximately 20% have had experiences that meet both the NYS and federal definition of human trafficking, and 27% are newcomer youth who have come to this great city in search of a better future for themselves.

I am here today to address a critical issue impacting the sustainability of our programs and services: the underfunding of current contracts that we have been told are now being extended for another two years and the failure to fund the citywide cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), as promised, at a compounded rate of 3% year over year from FY25-FY27.

For years, Covenant House New York and our sibling Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) agencies have partnered with the city to deliver essential programs that benefit our communities. However, the persistent underfunding of these contracts has significantly strained our ability to maintain the high-quality services that youth and

young adults in need depend on, and this challenge is further compounded by the heightened fear and uncertainty surrounding the future of the federal grants we rely on to fund key programs within our continuum of care. With potential cuts or delays in federal funding, we are facing an even greater risk of service disruptions at a time when our communities and our young people, especially, need stability and support the most.

Extending our current contracts without addressing the funding gaps only exacerbates the challenges we face to keep our doors open and provide the quality of services the young people in our care deserve to have. As costs continue to rise—whether due to inflation, increased operational expenses, or the need for competitive wages—the funding we receive remains stagnant, forcing us to do more with less.

Currently, the city funds our contracts at \$49,000-\$52,000 per bed, while our actual cost of operations for Covenant House New York is \$74,000 per bed. The gap, which amounts to about \$5.5M, forces us to find alternative funding sources to maintain services, which, in today's climate, is not a sustainable, long-term solution.

Despite these challenges and flat contract rates, we have remained deeply committed to serving young people who come through our doors with quality programs and dedicated support. Because of our staff's tireless efforts, over 600 Covenant House youth engaged in mental health services last year, 250 gained employment, and nearly 600 youth moved to stable housing. These outcomes reflect the dedication of our team, but sustaining and building on this success will only be possible with the proper funding to support this work.

Like many RHY providers, Covenant House New York has been asked to take on additional beds. While opening 100 new beds would undoubtedly provide more resources for runaway and homeless youth and young adults in need, it is simply not sustainable to expand capacity when we lack the necessary resources to support the beds we already provide. My team and I are committed to developing services where possible, but we cannot responsibly take on additional capacity without the necessary resources to sustain it.

In addition to underfunded contracts, the city's approach to the cost of living adjustment announced in March of last year is also of pressing concern. While these adjustments are meant to ensure that the human services workforce can keep up with the rising cost of living, what we now know to be accurate based on the numbers we were provided from DYCD is that the COLA being provided is cumulative, adding a few thousand dollars each year, versus compounded year over year, for three years, at 3%, as initially communicated. This means that while costs increase cumulatively, our funding does not keep pace, eroding our ability to raise wages, retain skilled staff, and recruit new talent. Last year, we made a commitment to our employees, based on the promise the city made to us, to provide a 3-year, 3% COLA to employees whose salaries were funded by city contracts, and we cannot uphold that commitment without the necessary funding from the city.

I urge the Council to ensure that the current contract extensions come with appropriate funding adjustments to reflect what it costs to run quality programming that our youth deserve and that the COLA issued last year is funded in the way our staff deserves.

Specifically, I join with other RHY providers and ask that the City:

- Increase the bed rate on the current DYCD contracts to \$70,000 per bed (this includes the 100 new beds)
- Fund the compounding COLA increases at 3%, year over year, as promised.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working together to find solutions to continue supporting youth and young adults seeking stability and a safe and loving place to call home.

Dr. Shakeema North-Albert  
CEO, Covenant House New York  
snorth@covenanthouse.org

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Dr. Shakeema North-Albert  
CEO, Covenant House New York  
snorth@covenanthouse.org



**Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.  
New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
March 20, 2025  
Presented by Nicole Touzien**

Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director. Dancewave has served youth across New York City for 29 years, providing positive youth development via dance education programming.

Each year, Dancewave provides direct services to 6,200 New Yorkers and connects with 24,000 people via digital engagement efforts -- all on a \$1M budget. We hire and train artists and arts workers, ensuring that we are connecting young people with the most talented, educated, and nurturing professionals in the field. We invest in delivering well-designed and well-executed programs, and data show that our investment is wise: Our programs are impactful and positively impact the lives of young people in our city.

In 2024 alone, we:

- Raised **\$50,000 for youth scholarships** to ensure equitable program access
- **Trained 520 young artists** at the Dancewave Center in Brooklyn
- Transitioned **400 youth into college and careers** in the arts
- Hosted **120 no-cost dance programs** in schools and community centers

Through partnerships with over 50 NYC Public Schools and community based organizations, we are able to provide no-cost programming to youth in all 51 City Council Districts. These programs help connect young people to empowering arts education programming who otherwise would not have access. With only 29% of NYC middle school students meeting state arts learning requirements, schools are hard pressed to find effective solutions. Nonprofit organizations like Dancewave help to fill in the gaps by providing qualified and vetted arts educators to the 1 in 5 schools absent a certified arts teacher. The city's investment in arts and cultural funding, while proportionally small to the overall \$114.5B preliminary budget, is critical to sustaining educational standards and supporting youth enrolled in over 1,800 NYC Public Schools.

Dancewave is one of over 1,000 arts and cultural organizations in New York City that steadfastly serves and delivers for the people of New York, fully inclusive of our youth. Our work is made possible by -- and will only continue with increased investment from -- the City. I ask for the committee's full support in advocating for increased and **baselined arts and culture funding in the amount of \$75M** for FY26 so that we can continue to serve our city's young people. This investment is necessary for the overall health and vibrancy of New York City, and will provide innumerable mental and physical health benefits to our community.

Thank you,  
Nicole Touzien  
Executive Director





**Testimony of Day Care Council of New York  
Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Children and Youth  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Prepared by Gregory Brender and Shelby Lohr**

**March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and members of the City Council Committee on Children and Youth for convening this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate that the City Council takes the time to hear from New Yorkers about the budget. It is a crucial conversation this year as the future of early childhood education, the availability of early childhood education programs in many underserved neighborhoods, and the livelihoods of countless hardworking and talented members of the early childhood education workforce are at stake.

The Day Care Council of New York (DCCNY) is the membership organization of early care and education providers across New York City. DCCNY works toward a future where all children have access to quality early childhood education and where early childhood providers and their workforce have the tools and resources necessary to offer the highest quality early childhood education.

DCCNY supports its member organizations and New York City's early childhood field through policy research and advocacy, labor relations and mediation, professional development and training for the early childhood workforce, and referral services for parents looking to find child care. DCCNY member organizations provide quality early care and education at more than 200 sites in neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

Most DCCNY member organizations operate with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) contracts. Many also work with federally-funded Head Start contracts, child care assistance vouchers, or private funding. DCCNY member organizations employ over 4,000 New Yorkers – the majority of whom are Black and Brown women.

**Families Losing Child Care Assistance**

In February, ACS reported to advocates and New York State legislators that the City is

set to exhaust its funding under the State's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). New York State distributes funds from the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) through the CCAP program to New York City and all other parts of the State.

ACS has stated that without additional funding for CCAP, it will be forced to turn away families eligible for child care assistance and deny recertification to families already receiving vouchers. This may result in between 4,000 and 7,000 families a month being denied recertification and thousands of other eligible families being turned away when they initially apply for child care assistance.

ACS has estimated a total need of approximately \$2.006 billion which is \$987 million more than New York State Office of Children and Family Services has designated for New York City.

The families who will lose care if action is not taken are working families with low incomes who earn under 85% of State Median Income (\$108,000 annually for a family of four). Under State and Federal law, low-income working families are eligible for child care assistance but are not guaranteed child care.

DCCNY has communicated to state leaders the urgency of New York State increasing its investment in CCAP. DCCNY is working with ACS and our allies across the State to urge the Governor and Legislature to fully fund CCAP. This will prevent families in New York City and throughout the rest of the State from losing access to Child Care Assistance.

The City must also take action to prevent this crisis, including investing its own funds. Both the City and the State must work together and make the investments needed to ensure that families can access Child Care Assistance.

### **Cuts to Early Childhood Education in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget**

On top of the aforementioned issues, Mayor Adams's Preliminary Budget Proposal cuts \$222 million from early childhood education programs. If enacted, these cuts will devastate families and the early childhood education providers who serve them.

DCCNY urges the City to make the following changes to the Mayor's Preliminary Budget:

#### **1. Keep the Promise of 3-K for All**

Mayor Adams has repeatedly promised that every family who wants a 3-K seat will get one. However, his budget cuts \$112 million from 3-K, and the City has not provided adequate data showing why these drastic cuts are justified.

DCCNY urges the City to:



- Commit to current 3-K funding – including the full number of seats and programs in School Year 2024-2025 – in the Mayor’s Executive Budget. Also, the City must invest at least the \$112 million eliminated in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget Proposal. A restoration in the Executive Budget, rather than at the time of budget adoption, will allow NYCPS time to work with community-based organizations to ensure that programs can open in September.
- Restore the timeline for 3-K expansion so that the City can achieve true universal access in every neighborhood.

## **2. Restore and baseline School Day Plus**

The School Day Plus pilot launched by the City Council supports a longer day and year in 77 community-based organizations working with School Day/School Year contracts. Because School Day Plus does not utilize the Federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), it does not have the strict eligibility requirements of Extended Day/Extended Year programs.

School Day Plus's flexibility empowers providers to respond to changing demographics in the neighborhoods they serve.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline \$25 million for School Day Plus.

## **3. Restore and baseline Promise NYC**

Promise NYC expands access to Child Care Assistance for families who otherwise would be denied and partners with community-based organizations to ensure that families can access the funding.

It is an important investment and a statement of the City’s values, showing a commitment to ending discrimination and expanding access to education.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC.

## **4. Restore and baseline Preschool Special Education**

Preschool Special Education programs address the needs of children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which lay out the special education instruction, supports, and services a student needs to thrive in school. Despite the increased need for Preschool Special Education programs, the Mayor’s budget eliminates \$55 million for Preschool Special Education programs.

DCCNY urges the City to restore and baseline this crucial funding.

## **5. Invest in the early childhood education workforce**

DCCNY is proud to have worked with our partners in organized labor to settle collective bargaining agreements that increase salaries for the early childhood workforce in many city-contracted center-based early childhood education programs. However, the biggest threat to the viability of the early childhood education system remains the inadequate salaries paid to the early childhood education workforce.

In almost every type of early childhood education program, the workforce is underpaid and underappreciated. The early childhood workforce is overwhelmingly women and, here in New York City, it is overwhelmingly women of color. Yet teachers, staff, directors, and providers continue to earn significantly less than their counterparts in public schools.

The City must take further action to eliminate these salary and benefit disparities that continue to drive talented educators, directors, and support staff out of early childhood education programs.

DCCNY urges the City to:

- Expedite the payment of collectively bargained salary increases to child care centers so they can start paying their staff increased salaries
- Identify new resources to increase pay for the early care and education workforce.

## **6. Improve enrollment procedures so families can more easily access early childhood education**

Many families continue to struggle to access early childhood education programs, leaving seats vacant and families without access to early care and education that meets their needs.

DCCNY urges the City to take the following immediate steps to improve families' access to early care and education.

- Invest in linguistically and culturally appropriate marketing, community engagement, and enrollment efforts for 3-K.
- Allow community-based enrollment where families can apply for a seat at the center of their choosing. Many families are more comfortable with a trusted community-based organization.



- Implement Presumptive Eligibility, which allows a family who is likely to be eligible for child care assistance to enroll in an Extended Day/Extended Year program or receive a voucher while their eligibility is being determined. Eligibility determinations can take months, and legislation enacted in December 2024 allows the City to utilize State and Federal funds to offer presumptive eligibility for families for the first time.

DCCNY is grateful that the New York City Council's Children and Youth Committee is having this important hearing when so much is at stake for early childhood education providers and New York City's families.

**Testimony for New York City Council  
Committee on Children & Youth  
Fiscal Year Preliminary Budget  
March 20, 2025**

[EdTrust-New York](#) is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to educational equity. We work to attain educational justice through research, policy, and advocacy that results in all students-especially those from low-income households or students of color, and particularly Black, Latinx, AAPI, and Native American students-achieving at high levels from early childhood through college completion. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for this hearing.


EdTrust-New York coordinates the [Raising NY](#) coalition, a statewide coalition of parent, early childhood, education, business, and health organizations dedicated to supporting the learning potential of all children, with a focus on improving long-term outcomes for young children of color, those in households with low-income, and other under-served groups.

**Child Care Funding Shortfall**

Child care costs remain one of the largest expenses for most families, and in recent years increasing numbers of families have moved away from New York City in large part due to these costs. In addition, child care providers/educators have been forced to close their programs due to inadequate compensation. To address these challenges, New York City has made significant progress since 2022 in expanding access to child care assistance through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), with the number of families receiving support increasing by [700%](#), according to the Administration for Children & Families (ACS). This helped New York City take the first steps toward universal child care by expanding eligibility for families to 185% of the State Median Income (SMI) and by increasing the market rate to pay providers more. Unsurprisingly, these steps in the right direction have a cost. Today, without additional investments to maintain this level of spending, 4,000-7,000 children each month will lose this vital assistance as families begin to apply for recertification through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). While we're pleased that ACS has increased the uptake of CCAP in recent years in neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, those communities will now be most impacted by this funding shortfall.

This funding shortfall will force families to cover the extra cost of \$1,500 or more per month, while programs will risk losing seats if families cannot afford care, causing further financial strain on an already chronically underfunded workforce. This year's State Executive Budget proposal does not allocate any additional funding for the child care workforce and it is uncertain if the Legislature will be able to add funding in the final budget due in April. After several years of one-time retention bonuses from the State, child care





programs report that they did little to solve ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, according to the [Empire State Campaign for Child Care](#). Child care providers/educators cannot afford an interruption in payments, as the [average provider earns](#) approximately \$38,000 annually, with [home-based providers earning even less](#) at \$10.50 an hour, or \$22,000 a year.

**We urge New York City leaders to work with State leaders to close this total funding gap of \$2.006B.** According to ACS, continuing to serve low-income families at the current level, as well as those guaranteed CCAP because they receive TANF, requires an immediate investment of \$987M for CCAP. An independent analysis by the Center for NYC Affairs has an estimate of \$823M and we urge at least this level of funding in this year's budget.

### **Promise NYC**

Every child has the right to access early care and learning opportunities that support healthy development and help maximize their learning potential. Promise NYC, a program that provides child care for families in low-income households who are not eligible for other forms of child care offered by the City, is a unique chance to foster economic security for some of the most marginalized families. According to our [Barriers to Opportunity report](#), co-authored with several Raising NY coalition members, a survey of newly arrived parents who were selling candy in the subways indicated that 42% of the respondents reported that accessing child care was one of their biggest obstacles in seeking resources and supports. Additionally, 83% of respondents said that they had been unable to pursue other employment opportunities due to difficulty accessing child care.

**We recommend that New York City maintain and baseline the current funding of \$25M in city tax levy for FY2026 to continue and sustain Promise NYC.**

### **Summer Rising**


Summer Rising is a popular and proven program that has successfully stemmed summer learning loss for NYCPS students. While we're pleased that City Council provided \$80 million in funding for this summer, we urge that **Summer Rising be baselined** so parents and students can count on this important program in future years. We also urge City Council to provide dedicated funding for bilingual summer school programming. For many years NYCPS has not provided bilingual programming in summer school to students who are in bilingual programs during the school year. Moving from bilingual programs during the school year to English-only programs during the summer is disruptive to their language learning and can lead to longer term challenges of not becoming proficient in either language.

### **Afterschool**

The Comprehensive After School System of New York City (COMPASS) provides afterschool programming for school-aged children citywide. This vital resource provides academic enrichment, peer socialization, career exploration, social emotional learning, and access to other resources and opportunities. For over a decade, afterschool programs







have not seen an increase in their base funding, which has left programs financially unsustainable, exacerbated the staffing shortage crisis, and jeopardized program quality. We urge the City to commit to **funding higher base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to maintain the stability of NYC's afterschool system.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our written testimony.

Please feel free to contact Lara Kyriakou, Associate Director for Early Childhood Policy & Advocacy at [lkryiakou@edtrustny.org](mailto:lkryiakou@edtrustny.org) with any additional questions regarding this testimony. Thank you.





**Testimony of Educational Alliance  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Councilmember Althea Stevens, Chair  
March 20, 2025**

Educational Alliance is a settlement house with community centers located throughout the Lower East Side and East Village that offer individuals and families high-quality, multi-generational programs and services that enhance their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities. Among our many offerings, Educational Alliance has a long history of providing youth development programs on the Lower East Side through our afterschool programs, teen center, community schools partnerships, and summer youth programming.

Educational Alliance is guided by the principle that each person is born with a divine spark of dignity and creativity; this belief is central to our youth development philosophy and programming which incorporates social and emotional skill-building and self-expression through arts, drama, fitness, cooking and much more. We believe that every child in New York City deserves access to safe, enriching and high-quality afterschool programs. To achieve this, New York City must significantly increase funding for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to ensure these vital services remain accessible, sustainable, and high-quality for all families, particularly as rising costs threaten both the stability of these programs and the working families who depend on them.

As the City grows increasingly unaffordable, expanding access to free, high-quality afterschool programs is critical to addressing the childcare crisis and greatly help families who want to continue raising their children in our communities. Afterschool is a critical part of the childcare system in New York and helps working families ensure their kids are safe and supported after the school day ends. But it is also more than 'just' childcare – afterschool programs provide academic support, mentorship, and skill building, and exposure to opportunities that are so important for helping young people envision their own futures. Through interpersonal relationships, intellectual exploration and creativity, and the self-confidence they gain from new experiences, kids can grow into the people they are meant to be. At Educational Alliance's afterschool programs, we call this flourishing.

One example of this is the musical theater instruction that has been run at P.S. 140 by Educational Alliance for the last 15 years. Students work with our professional musical theater instructor, Ms. Atonia, and start by creating [small dance performances](#) and working their way up to full-scale productions of popular musicals like *Lion King* and *Matilda*. Because of our incredible and professional instructor, Ms. Atonia, thousands of children have learned the joy of theater and dance performance and, in the process, have developed tenacity and poise, and expanded their capacity for artistic collaboration.

Afterschool programs like ours are rich with programming that awakens kids to arts, science, literature and, most importantly, their own potential. However, these transformative experiences are increasingly threatened by a funding structure that fails to keep pace with economic realities. Providers cannot be expected to offer high-quality programs like this without increased investment from our City partners. Across the City, COMPASS/SONYC afterschool programs have struggled for years with low staff wages

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which have led to recruitment and retention challenges, as well as vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process.

In addition, Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) recently informed providers that contracts would be extended through Summer 2028, but that the extension would not include an increase to the base funding rates. This means programs must continue operating under the original funding structure, which for many providers is a decade old or more. In the face of higher costs due to inflation, running programs on an old cost structure simply financially unsustainable. This disinvestment is unacceptable and the City must commit to funding higher base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to maintain the stability of NYC's afterschool system.

As a member of United Neighborhood Houses, we support the #InvestAfter3PM campaign and call on City leaders to increase base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget. Adequate investment in afterschool programs is a moral commitment to our children, and a fiscally responsible decision that will yield significant returns for New York City—improving academic outcomes, increasing future workforce readiness, supporting working families, and ultimately creating stronger, more resilient communities that require fewer costly interventions down the road.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**SASKIA TRAILL**

**PRESIDENT & CEO EXPANDED SCHOOLS**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL**

**COMMITTEE ON FINANCE & THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

**FISCAL YEAR 2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING: MARCH 20, 2025**

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My name is Saskia Traill and I am the President/CEO of ExpandedED Schools. Thank you to Speaker Adams, Chair Stevens, Chair Brannan, and the Committee on Finance, as well as the Committee on Children and Youth, for the opportunity to testify here today. It's a pleasure to work collaboratively with all of you to create effective strategies to increase access, equity, and quality in expanded learning opportunities for young people across New York City.

ExpandedED Schools is dedicated to ensuring that all young people in New York City have access to enriching programs that affirm their identities, teach them valuable skills, and spark new possibilities in and out of the school day.

We are a youth-serving intermediary that supports direct service community-based organizations (CBO's) across the five boroughs to cultivate positive relationships with school leaders and deliver high-quality programs to students and families. For more than 20 years, we have invested funds from the City Council to CBO's to provide necessary afterschool services throughout the five boroughs. We also provide robust professional development to afterschool staff, support quality afterschool by visiting programs and providing regular support to afterschool site directors, and convene site directors to learn from one another's practice.

In FY24, a citywide discretionary award from the City Council enabled ExpandedED to fund programs in 34 Council Districts. These funds directly supported approximately 7,220 students in 59 afterschool programs; and 360 educators in 32 professional development events with staff from 96 CBOs. ExpandedED has served more than 1.6 million public school students since its inception, working with more than 130 community partners and 300 schools throughout all five boroughs. The vast majority of our students identify as young people of color (85%) and most live in low-income communities (75%).

I would like to thank the Council, this Committee, and Chair Stevens, and the Department of Youth and Community Development for the \$4M investment for afterschool enrichment in last year's budget process.

I also want to testify about the critical importance of afterschool funding throughout the City. For the past 25 years, ExpandedED has worked to build, refine, and sustain New York City's foundational system of school-community partnership for afterschool programming. We know that afterschool is a place where our city's youth and families turn to for fundamental supports beyond childcare: a space for youth to deepen their skills and interests through extra learning time, connect to their peers and caring adults, and explore new opportunities and innovative programming - none of which could be possible without the foundation of a strong afterschool system.



We are proud that these critical and enriching opportunities to grow and explore have been sustained as a core part of our city's infrastructure over the past 20 years; but afterschool in NYC today, especially in the wake of the pandemic, looks vastly different than when we launched a citywide municipal system of out-of-school-time programming in 2005.

At the youth level, young people and their families face uncertainty from federal policy changes that directly affect many New Yorkers' lives. This uncertainty is on top of continued severe and long-lasting effects of interrupted instruction, social isolation, job loss, and economic turmoil from the pandemic. Youth are bringing new needs to afterschool, while at the same time afterschool workers need more supports to meet these crucial needs.

At the program level, afterschool leaders are working to understand how to run strong programs that meet current needs of children and families, and at cost models that were set more than ten years ago. These cost models do not account for the true cost of quality programming. Without increases to existing contracts, we are jeopardizing the quality of our programs and the impacts they can have on our young people.

At the city level, pandemic funding cliffs coupled with a federal administration hostile to public supports for education and youth development require city leadership from the New York City Council to ensure we do not leave our young people behind.

We are grateful and proud of what we have been able to do in partnership with the council through our **\$4.0M Afterschool Enrichment Citywide Initiative Award in FY25**. Programs mostly leverage the subgrants we distribute to fill gaps that either enable CBO's to fortify their staffing, serve more students, or engage in other inputs around program quality. At a small number of programs, the subgrant is their primary public funding stream. For that reason, unless requested by our CBO partner, we rarely take funding away from a previously funded site. We know firsthand the impact to families and communities of cutting services. Therefore, to scale our work, we require additional funding.

**Our FY26 request for \$6.0M** would enable ExpandedED to support community organizations in five boroughs to offer more afterschool slots K-12 and to increase quality. Additional Afterschool Enrichment Initiative funds would enable us to support more young people, more programs, and more districts during this period of extraordinary need for afterschool and positive youth development throughout New York City. It would also give us greater capacity to serve middle and high school programs where there are newfound gaps and support programs that have diminished funding. We welcome partnership with each council member to identify school partners in need of our support because you know your constituency and districts best.

Thank you again to Speaker Adams, Chair Brannan, Chair Stevens and the rest of your respective committees for holding this hearing and for all the work that you do for children and families across the City. I look forward to continuing to be a partner in services to young people and community, particularly when it comes to extended learning time enrichment programming and the cultivation of the safe and validating spaces that they deserve.



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NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Public Testimony  
March 20, 2025

To The New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth:

Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center, I would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Children and Youth for convening this hearing. My name is Amy Leipziger and I am the Project Director of the Free to Be Youth Project.

Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to be Youth Project (FYP) is a direct legal service provider dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. The project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are low-income, living on the streets, in homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system, or in foster care. We regularly travel to drop-in and community centers, including the Ali Forney Center, Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project, the LGBT Center, HMI, and Staten Island Pride to offer direct legal services and know-your-rights workshops. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal issues like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, and overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing.

In the last several years, we have seen an increased need for shelter, legal aid, and other critical services for unhoused and at-risk youth. FYP, alongside RHY service providers across the city, have been at the forefront of supporting these uniquely vulnerable populations. As the New York City Council begins budget proceedings for FY2026, we urge the Committee on Children and Youth to allocate the necessary funding to support and uplift homeless youth.



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## Drop-in and Community Centers

In New York City, there are 146,000 students (up to age 21) attending schools that experience homelessness. While nationally only 9.4% of the population identifies as LGBTQ+, 40% of unhoused youth self-identify as queer or transgender. This statistic suggests there are over 58,400 LGBTQ+ young New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, this number does not reflect those youth and young adults that are not enrolled in school or disconnected from social services. The city estimates that there are approximately 20,000 homeless youth and young adults connected to social services, adding, at minimum, an additional 8,000 homeless LGBTQ+ youth and young adults in the city. Although shelter facilities are meant to house and support this population, increased need has put a strain on their resources. Between January 1, 2024 and June 20, 2024, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) funded a total of 813 beds—with 671 allocated for children under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> In that same 6-month period, 1,127 youth aged 16-24 were unable to be matched with a bed at DYCD shelters. 789 of them were under 18. Beds are in short supply and few are allocated to LGBTQ+ youth. To not be matched to a bed means to be denied critical and life-saving shelter and assistance services. It is essential that outreach and drop-in centers receive increased funding to support the growing number of unhoused youth in the city. **A general contract increase of \$1.03 million for all street outreach and drop-in center RHY contracts would help ensure there is baseline funding available to house youth.** Additionally, current DYCD-funded RHY provider contracts insufficiently cover the costs of program operations. **Raising the bed rate to a consistent \$70,000 per bed would allow equitable and adequate funding for all programs supporting our City's youth.**

Beyond providing LGBTQ+ youth with basic needs, it is necessary that the City invest in their mental health and well-being. LGBTQ+ youth report increased levels of depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, or attempts to die by suicide. The Trevor Project's annual report on LGBTQ+ youth mental health revealed that 50% of transgender and non-binary young people seriously considered ending their life—with 1 in 5 attempting suicide.<sup>2</sup> Concerningly, there is an incredible lack of access to mental health care for LGBTQ+ youth. 81% of LGBTQ+ youth reported wanting access to mental health care—56% of whom reported being unable to receive



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it.<sup>2</sup> Despite serving as safe spaces for homeless youth, drop-in and community centers often do not have the capacity or qualifications to effectively respond to severe mental health concerns. **It is crucial that the City work with current providers to establish higher bed rates for specialized programs—including expanding care services to include clinical mental health support.**

### Resources for Newly Arrived and Immigrant Youth

City funding must also appropriately accommodate the immigrant and unaccompanied minors that drop-in and community centers are aiding. This past year, FYP has witnessed and responded to an unprecedented demand for legal services from recently arrived LGBTQ+ youth in New York—especially arriving from Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of these newly arrived youth face the possibility of deportation to countries that respond to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and lived experiences with hostility and life-threatening persecution.

Newly arrived and immigrant youth often have no connections in the US and have nowhere to turn to. Their immigration status and the fear of being detained or deported leads many to stay silent about harm done to them. This fear further inhibits them from seeking shelter and support services, including critical legal aid. Outreach, drop-in, and community centers across New York City have sought to address this concern. By providing accessible and empathetic support, these spaces have functioned as safe and trusted avenues for undocumented LGBTQ+ youth. Our attorneys at FYP do legal intake at these centers, creating comfortable pathways for young people to access free civil and criminal legal services that may otherwise seem intimidating and out of reach. However, this growing population and their needs are quickly outpacing our abilities and that of our partner organizations. **A one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded drop-in centers would help ensure that the basic needs of newly arrived and immigrant youth are met.** This supplemental funding will ensure that this vulnerable population receives adequate and appropriate care.

To effectively support and protect these vulnerable populations, it is also crucial to connect them with adequate legal resources and services. These services not only ensure that youth have access to legal protections and pathways to residency or asylum, but also help them navigate complex



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legal systems with guidance and support. At FYP, we've recently noticed an increased need to support youth eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status ("SIJS")—granted to single individuals under 21 years of age who cannot be reunited with a parent or guardian because of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. SIJS process is complicated and lengthy and we don't have the capacity to meet the heightened demand. Youth in DYCD programs have been excluded from city-funded legal services (including SIJS), leaving many without the opportunity to seek this immigration relief. **It is critical that \$625,000 be made available for five full-time lawyer positions that can aid with DYCD-funded RHY legal services.** This will ensure youth have access to all immigration pathways, including SIJS.

### Budget Recommendations

Without increased and adequate support services, immigrant and LGBTQ+ youth will continue to fall through the cracks in our system, struggling to access the resources they need to become successful contributors to the New York City community. Beyond the budget recommendations we've included throughout this testimony, I've outlined other recommendations that FYP and our partner organizations strongly encourage.

- **Maintain \$1.5 million funding for 16 housing specialists in the RHY system** — The specialists that were funded through temporary federal Emergency Housing Voucher funds have facilitated record-breaking transitions of youth to stable housing. Continued funding is necessary to sustain this critical support.
- **Baseline funding for financial counseling in youth programs** — Local law requires programs to provide financial counseling services. This investment will ensure our youth have access to critical financial education necessary to building long-term stability.
- **\$2.6 million to fund two pilot programs that offer on-site clinical services and intensive care management** — This programming will allow youth access to critical specialized care.
- **Restore \$1.62 million for Peer Navigator positions in the RHY system** — These 16 Peer Navigator positions are essential to impactful services.

Thank you to the members of this Committee and to the community of youth advocates who have been working hard to address the needs of this community. The Free to Be Youth Project



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stands ready to assist the NYC Council Committee on Children and Youth in any way that we can.

1. Runaway & Homeless Youth Services, “Local Law 79 Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Services Access Report,” Department of Youth and Community Development, January 1, 2024 to July 30, 2024, available at [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local\\_Law\\_79-Runaway-and-Homeless-Youth\\_Services\\_Access\\_Report\\_January-1-to-June-30-2024.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/Local_Law_79-Runaway-and-Homeless-Youth_Services_Access_Report_January-1-to-June-30-2024.pdf).
2. “The Trevor Project: 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People,” The Trevor Project, [https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/assets/static/05\\_TREVOR05\\_2023survey.pdf](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/assets/static/05_TREVOR05_2023survey.pdf).

Send to: [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services

Submitted by  
**Nickesha Francis Policy and Advocacy Manager**  
Good Shepherd Services

March 20, 2025

Thank you, Chair Althea Stevens and the Members of the Committee on Children and Youth for hosting this hearing to examine the Mayor's **Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026**.

My name is Nickesha Francis, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd Services. Good Shepherd supports the priorities set forth by the Campaign for Children, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies and the Runaway Homeless Youth Coalition.

Good Shepherd operates 94 programs that support 33,860 children and families across the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn. Guided by our values, Good Shepherd Services partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

Good Shepherd Services operates Foster Care, Prevention, Juvenile Justice, Parent Support, Alternative to Detention, Summer Rising, Saturday Night Lights, the Summer Youth Employment Program, After School, Cure Violence, Cornerstone, Beacon and Runaway and Homeless Youth programs.

My testimony will focus on the ongoing workforce and budget needs of the Children and Youth programs.

**Workforce and Staffing**

Child welfare staff and case managers are essential workers who form the safety net that keep children safe, they must be paid a living wage to continue to drive positive outcomes for children and families. Without the ability to recruit and pay staff market rates with government dollars, agencies are not able to maintain program utilization or attain service targets by the very agencies they contact with. For example [ACS - Youth Development Specialist](#) job posting has a starting salary of \$53,341 and after 5 years that increases up to \$67,566 along with longevity bonuses and many other benefits. The Non-Profits cannot compete with these offers because our contracts will not allow us to pay annual increases or bonuses.

- **Pay Parity** - Agencies continue to experience high staff turnover and carry unusually high vacancy rates. For example, according to data gathered by COFCCA Workforce Compensation Report, in 2022, there was a 47% average turnover for NYC prevention

caseworkers and a 22% average vacancy rate.<sup>1</sup> Current prevention budgets bound providers to pay very low salaries.

- **Staff Turnover** – Agencies invest a huge amount of money into onboarding, training and developing new workers to prepare staff to work with children and families. Too often, newly trained staff leave after 2 years for higher paying government jobs. Nonprofit child welfare organizations become training grounds as they watch their investments walk out the door. Providers need additional resources to recruit, hire, and retain a highly qualified workforce.
- **Career Development Support** – Child welfare staff need workforce supports to increase career development opportunities. Child welfare staff tell us that in addition to salary increases, they need support with scholarships, tuition assistance and loan forgiveness to achieve higher educational goals. The low salaries make it impossible for licensed mental health staff to continue their education and pay off student loans.

### **Delayed and Delinquent Payments**

Late payments to contracted agencies significantly impact the delivery of services and cause major problems for human services organizations. Delayed payments result in struggles to keep agency doors open, operate programs, and to meet payroll. According to the Human Services Coalition, 90% of nonprofits report delayed payments totaling \$365 million dollars, making it almost impossible to sustain fully operational programs. Providers are often forced to obtain and use lines of credit to maintain program operations, only to pay interest on the loan without a way to recoup fees for interests, thereby, subsidizing city contracts.

### **Underfunded Prevention Contracts**

The successful reduction in foster care placements in NYC would not be possible without prevention services. Prevention programs make it possible for more children to remain safely in their homes and out of foster care placement. In 2025, an ACS prevention family survey showed positive experiences and strong satisfactions with prevention services. Unfortunately, the resources and funding from the reduced foster care census have not resulted in additional dollars to support the wide range of services offered by prevention programs.

Contracted prevention services agencies are almost 5 years into a 9-year prevention contract, and they do not see a clear pathway to continued efficient and effective service delivery with the current fiscal deficits that are expected to become even more unmanageable over the life of the contract. Large and small agencies have the same fixed costs, and they need to be able to maintain staffing levels, serve families, and sustain slot utilization. Without an increase in baseline salaries of BA level staff and the ability to address compression matters - prevention programs will continually have trouble in hiring staff and having adequate capacity to serve families.

The ACS prevention budgets (and the underlying budget approval, invoice and modification processes) do not allow agencies to respond to drastic changes in the labor market over the last few years. Human Services

Workers are in direct competition not only with public sector employers like ACS and DOE, but also with private sector employers offering greater flexibility around remote work, telehealth,

and scheduling. The salaries providers are offering are too low to consistently fill positions, so those slots go vacant and the dollars go unspent.

### **Obtaining and Affording Liability Insurance for Foster Care Programs**

Nonprofit child welfare organizations must be able to access, obtain, and pay for liability insurance to provide foster care services. Foster care agencies are required per their contracts to carry certain levels of commercial general liability insurance, professional liability insurance, and, depending on the county requirements—potentially excess umbrella liability coverage. Due to social inflation and increasing pressures in the insurance market specifically related to foster care, agencies in NYS and nationwide are experiencing significant challenges in accessing coverage. If nonprofit providers (which currently provide care for all the children and youth in foster care in New York City) cannot provide foster care, the responsibility for the provision of foster care services will shift to the city. Children and youth in foster care are in the care and custody of New York State, and the voluntary foster care agencies are the primary provider of care for children and youth in foster care. This is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. There are very few insurance providers in this sector already, and we have seen the field become smaller in recent months. Providers will not be able to continue providing foster care services without appropriate insurance coverage.

### **Summer Rising**

Good Shepherd Services supports over 2,000 elementary and middle school students through summer rising and over 400 across our two Cornerstone programs. Chair Stevens tackled many of our concerns in her line of questioning related to timing of school site designations, the importance of the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) coordination and the role early conversations between principals and providers play in ensuring the success of the program.

DYCD has confirmed that Summer Rising, the partnership between DYCD and the NYCPS to provide integrated summer school and summer camp to elementary- and middle-school aged youth, will continue in Summer. Despite holding a series of provider feedback sessions wherein CBOs raised challenges with this model—including issues with centralized NYCPS enrollment that left many summer camp slots unused, a lack of choice for parents and families who may prefer a more traditional summer camp experience, and inconsistent support for students with disabilities—there have been no clear changes or improvements made.

In order for Summer Rising to be successful for all parties, but especially for children and families who deserve summer opportunities that fulfill their needs, the City must consider the following:

- Baseline \$19.6M in FY27 and beyond.
- CBOs must have control over participant registration, especially families who need additional digital and language support to apply for programming,
  - Maintain their own rosters so that if there are young people who cannot attend the CBO's programming. CBOs have the power to unenroll that youth and give that slot to a young person who cannot attend so the slot does not go to waste
- Allow families and their youth to choose whether to attend summer school, camp or both, and allow CBOs the chance to record how many young people choose which service.

- In addition, Summer Rising can only be set up for success if there is increased and coordinated support for students with disabilities to make sure CBOs have resources, they need to properly serve these young people.

## **COMPASS/SONYC**

COMPASS/SONYC programs have struggled in recent years with low staff wages leading to recruitment and retention challenges, vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process. Furthermore, COMPASS/SONYC programs have not been re-procured in many years, leaving providers with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation or changes in the labor market. DYCD must reissue an RFP that reflects the true cost of providing high quality afterschool programming.

Good Shepherd Services supports the Campaign for Children ask for the following investments must be included in New York City's FY 2026 enacted budget to get the City on the path to ensuring that all children and youth can access reliable, affordable, and enriching services that help support parents' participation in the workforce:

1. Reverse the \$6.9 million cut made to the COMPASS afterschool system in FY 2025.
2. We urge DYCD to work with providers to begin a phase-in process for higher per participant rates in the FY 2026 COMPASS and SONYC contract extensions, committing to a halfway increase of base rates to:
  - **\$4900 per participant** for COMPASS Elementary and
  - **\$4150 per participant** for SONYC Middle School Programs

## **Runaway Homeless Youth**

- Fund 100 additional DYCD RHY beds - \$5.6M
- One-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Center contracts - \$1.63
- "Right-size" Runaway and Homeless Youth Residential Contracts - \$5.5M
- Fund Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services - \$625,000
- Maintain funding for the 16 Housing Specialists in the DYCD-RHY System - \$1.5M
- Restore and baseline funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System - \$1.6M

## **Juvenile Justice**

We are calling on the Council to support the Youth Justice Fund legislation introduced by NYS Senators Cleare and Solages - A767 (Solages) / S643 (Cleare). The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would direct \$50 million to community-based organizations to provide a continuum of services from prevention, early intervention, to alternatives to detention, placement and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25.



In conclusion, we urge the council to continue to demand that the administration respond to and address the needs of children, youth and families and fully support the nonprofit human services sector which is the backbone of social services in this city.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

# **TESTIMONY**

The New York City Council  
Committee on Children and Youth

Re: Preliminary Budget

Grand St. Settlement  
80 Pitt Street  
New York, New York

March 20, 2025



Testimony of Grand St. Settlement  
To the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth.  
Regarding The Preliminary Budget

March 20, 2025

**Kris Greene, Deputy Director of Brooklyn Youth Programs**

Thank you, Council Member Stevens and members of the New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth for convening this preliminary hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Grand St. Settlement (Grand Street) is a 109-year-old multi-service Settlement House. We serve over 18,000 New Yorkers through vital early childhood, youth, and older adult programs infused with impactful benefits assistance on the Lower East Side, Manhattan, and The Bronx. Grand Street's youth programs encourage young people to follow their passions and guide them to becoming civically engaged and successful citizens. Our youth programs support nearly 7,000 youth with high-quality programs.

Grand Street is also a member of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), a policy and social change organization, representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. As a member organization, we collaborate to support youth programs and services.

Today we are asking the City to strengthen and preserve youth programs and commit to funding. Specifically, we are asking for the following:

- Increase afterschool rates for COMPASS/SONYC providers to reflect the true cost of programming, with a total of \$322 million at scale.
- Set aside Summer Rising funding for new models of summer programming to give families choices and offer activities that appeal to a range of students, especially middle school students.

City funding supports many of our youth education programs at Grand Street. We offer afterschool programming as part of the Comprehensive After School System (COMPASS), a nationally acclaimed network for school-aged youth from kindergarten through high school graduation. From homework support and mentoring to dance and recreation, we help youth develop key skills to be successful. Specifically, we operate 12 Cornerstone Youth Programs throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan. Cornerstones provides youth with engaging, high-quality services in partnership with NYCHA and our strong network of nonprofit providers across the City. Grand Street's Cornerstone Youth Programs serve working families and youth, many of whom live in NYCHA housing and face multiple obstacles to education, health, and economic prosperity. Our outcomes include:

- 3,000 hours of hands-on learning experiences for after-school youth annually
- An average of 70% teen participation at our Cornerstones, which met or exceeded enrollment goals.
- Over 100 youth attend Grand Street's annual youth summits where teens participate in workshops focused on financial literacy, college and career readiness, and maintaining healthy relationships.
- Collaboration with the Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) for Neighborhood Safety to improve relationships between high school youth and NYPD at Grand Street's Cornerstones, thereby reducing gang activity, increasing employment opportunities, and connecting hundreds of residents to HRA benefits.

In addition to our partnerships with DYCD and NYCHA at our Cornerstones, we offer out-of-school learning opportunities for youth through community partnerships. As a member of the international Clubhouse Network, we provide science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) learning opportunities for youth at The Best Buy Teen Tech Center at Grand Street. The makerspace is for teens (ages 13-19) to explore potential future careers in the STEAM sector. Our tech center provides a creative, safe, and free out-of-school learning environment where young people from underserved communities work with adult mentors to explore their ideas, develop new skills, and build confidence in themselves through the use of technology. Last year, a select group of participants were invited to Minnesota, Minneapolis to participate in a national robotics competition and showcase their invention. This feat underscores the importance of programs like the Teen Tech Center.

The expansive system of after-school programs administered by the Department of Youth & Community Development is a vital part of New York's human services sector and one of our city's most valuable resources. The City's free youth programs are invaluable resources to many families who cannot afford to pay for out-of-school programs. Consistent participation in these programs is correlated with positive outcomes for youth, including improved academic and behavioral outcomes. Youth programs also reduce risk factors that impact youth, including court

involvement and juvenile delinquency. As future federal funding for these programs remains uncertain, the City must proactively invest in youth programs to promote community well-being. These programs are vital to community development and empowerment it is more important now, more than ever that we invest in these programs.

The decisions made today at this hearing will immediately impact working families. If we do not invest in our youth, we are jeopardizing their short—and long-term success. Funding for youth programs is an investment in our communities and our future. For these reasons, we urge the City to increase afterschool rates for COMPASS/SONYC and set aside funding for Summer Rising.



## TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Delivered by:

Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition  
March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director of Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE), a coalition of seven legal services organizations dedicated to ensuring that unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have access to free legal representation. Our members, Catholic Charities Community Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Human Rights First, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Legal Aid Society, The Door, and Safe Passage Project, are on the frontlines of this work every day, fighting to ensure that no child has to face the immigration system alone.

**We are calling on the City to meet this moment and expand its investment in legal services for unaccompanied children.**

Right now, thousands of immigrant children in New York are stuck in legal limbo, waiting years for their cases to be resolved. Nearly 7,000 unaccompanied children arrived here last year alone—fleeing war, trafficking, and gang violence. Instead of finding safety, they are thrown into an immigration system so complex that even trained attorneys struggle to navigate it. Yet, these children—some as young as toddlers—are expected to stand before a judge and argue their own case against a government prosecutor. Without an attorney, they have just a 15% chance of success. With an ICARE attorney, that number jumps to over 90%.



Despite the critical need, legal services for unaccompanied children remain dangerously underfunded. In late February, a sudden federal stop-work order temporarily froze all funding for unaccompanied children's legal services nationwide. Although the order was rescinded within 48 hours, it was a wake-up call: these protections can disappear overnight. Now, the same federal contact that funds these services is up for renewal at the end of March, a decision that will determine the future of legal representation for 26,000 children. The federal government has made it clear that funding for immigration legal services is unpredictable, politically vulnerable and clearly not enough. With ongoing threats of mass deportations and additional funding cuts at the federal level, New York must step up to protect young immigrants and ensure their legal rights are not dependent on an uncertain federal landscape. **We cannot gamble with children's futures.**

At the same time, the immigration court backlog is at an all-time high. Cases that once took months now stretch on for years, leaving children in legal limbo—unable to move forward with their education, employment, or sense of stability. The backlog also puts an enormous strain on legal service providers, who are being forced to stretch already limited resources, making it harder to take on new cases or provide the comprehensive representation that these cases require. We are at a breaking point: without increased city investment, thousands of children will remain unrepresented and at risk of deportation, homelessness, trafficking, and exploitation.

For over a decade, the City Council's investment in the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative has been a lifeline. ICARE providers have represented more than 14,000 children and families. These legal services don't just help children navigate court—they create





pathways to stability and opportunity. They allow kids to enroll in school, access healthcare, and build a future here in New York. Legal representation changes lives.

But while the need continues to grow, city funding for unaccompanied children's legal services has remained stagnant for six years. At the same time, costs have risen, and demand has skyrocketed. ICARE providers are being forced to do more with less, while thousands of children remain on waiting lists for legal help. This is unsustainable.

That is why today, **ICARE is requesting \$6,297,250 through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative to support 2,013 children and families through legal screenings, know-your-rights trainings, direct representation, and referrals to essential social services.** This investment is not just about legal services—it is about ensuring New York remains a city that protects its most vulnerable.

New York has long been a place that stands for justice. But justice requires action. These children came here seeking safety, and we have a responsibility to ensure they have the opportunity for due process, and we cannot turn our backs on them now.

We urge the Council to meet this moment and expanding funding for unaccompanied children's legal services. Thank you for your time, I look forward to our continued partnership in making sure that New York remains a city of refuge, opportunity, and justice for all of our community members.

In Community,

Sierra Kraft  
Executive Director,  
ICARE Coalition  
[skraft@icarecoalition.org](mailto:skraft@icarecoalition.org)



[www.icarecoalition.org](http://www.icarecoalition.org)





Committee on Children and Youth

TOPIC: Preliminary Budget Hearing

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Testimony by

Julie Finkel

Program Director, Child-Parent Psychotherapy

JCCA

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. Thank you for calling this hearing and inviting JCCA to testify on behalf of the children and families we provide with child welfare, mental health, and educational assistance.

My name is Julie Finkel, Director of our Child-Parent Psychotherapy program in Brooklyn. I have dedicated my entire social work career to working in our Prevention department at JCCA; starting as an intern in 2013 and working my way up to a Program Director in 2024. I have provided therapy to families experiencing crisis, poverty, and trauma, and have worked with frontline staff and supervisors to help children and their caretakers achieve increased stability and family functioning.

JCCA is a child and family services agency that works with about 17,000 of New York State's children and families each year. We provide foster and residential care, educational assistance and remediation, and behavioral health services. JCCA's wellness supports for young people struggling with emotional challenges are critical to preventing and addressing family dysfunction and instability.

On behalf of JCCA, I am asking for a greater investment in city-funded programs that help youth and families in challenging situations realize their fullest potential.

#### **A. Services JCCA provides**

JCCA provides prevention and foster care services, primarily funded by ACS. Our prevention programs help families resolve immediate problems, thereby keeping children safely at home. As a foster care agency, JCCA provides Fair Futures coaching, which offers transitional-aged youth with education and workforce development support as they move into adulthood.

JCCA is also a provider of the Mott Haven and East Flatbush Community Partnership programs, funded by ACS. These programs connect children and parents with community resources to help address these needs holistically by learning to develop skills, solve problems, and strengthen relationships within the community.

Due to the generous funding from City Council, we provide **City's First Readers'** early literacy services to children aged 0-5, administered by DYCD, and **Wraparound Services for Transitional-Aged Foster Youth initiative's** educational and vocational supports to youth aging out of foster care, administered by ACS.

We also continue to work with migrant families we met through our previous volunteer work at a Brooklyn shelter.

I would like to highlight our Prevention programs. Most families enrolled in our programs faced trauma, family conflict, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, and behavior challenges. Through these programs, we provide families with critical support through evidence-based models such as Functional Family Therapy, Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Family Treatment Rehabilitation, and Solution-Based Casework. These services have provided a transformative experience for many of our families. For example, our Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) treatment model for families with children 0-5 years old. We successfully worked with a mother and her two young children. After a series of confrontations with the children's father, the two-year-old was unable to sleep in her own bed and had difficulty with eating and toileting. The four-year-old was fearful whenever someone knocked on the door. The therapist conducted dyadic play therapy sessions with the mother and children, which increased the mother's capacity to understand the impact that the family's traumatic experiences had on her children and better support their emotional and mental health needs. By the end of treatment, the older child had increased confidence and academic success, and the younger child was able to sleep in her own bed, displaying increased emotional regulation and communication skills. During the Service Termination Conference, the mother discussed how much support and help CPP provided her family.

## **What can New York City Council do?**

### ***1. Expand program funding***

I ask that City Council expand funding for our ACS and DYCD contracted programs, including Foster Care, Prevention, and Community Partnership programs and City Council initiatives such as City's First Readers and Wraparound Services for Transitional-Aged Foster Youth. These

programs have a tremendous impact on youth and families, and we want to ensure that they have the capacity to reach all New Yorkers who need them. However, our programs have been unable to retain staff and provide enhanced supports as funding has not kept pace with increased costs. Due to limited funding, staff resign from JCCA to work for higher-paying competitors in the public and private sectors. This disrupted the continuity of services, leaving families without consistent care and support. Without increased investments to reflect its true costs, providers like JCCA will be unable to provide efficient services and support the City's goals, such as reducing foster care placements.

Many of our families experience chronic poverty, mental health challenges, and struggle to meet their day-to-day concrete needs. While our staff works diligently to connect families to community resources, there are times when a family experiences a crisis that necessitates immediate support. With increased funding, JCCA will be able to organize events and activities that promote family bonding and support more families with purchasing emergency groceries, clothing, and other basic necessities. Increased funding will also allow us to pay our human services staff higher salaries and increase retention.

## **2. Ask the state to increase prevention reimbursement rates**

I also encourage the city to advocate for the State to increase reimbursement of prevention services to localities. Currently, the state reimburses 62% of prevention services, which represents a cut after many years of reimbursing at a rate of 65%. The State Senate has included \$35 million in additional funding in their one-house budget to increase the State reimbursement rate from 62% to 65% for prevention services. We encourage the city to support this effort.

### **3. Invest in foster care supports**

I also encourage the city to help with recruiting foster homes that will meet the diverse needs of foster youth. Foster parent recruitment is challenging in this city, even without language and religion barriers. It would be helpful if the city assists and supports the promotion of fostering young people through public information campaigns, such as subway posters, to expand the availability of culturally diverse foster homes. Further investment in training and support for foster parents is also needed so that foster parents are better equipped to provide foster youth with a safe and secure environment.

### **4. Invest in housing and job opportunities for youth transitioning out of foster care**

We also ask that the city address the housing and employment challenges facing youth aging out of foster care. There is a shortage of affordable housing in the city, with limited high-paying jobs. Many of the transitional-aged foster youth we serve face difficulty in securing permanent housing as they enter adulthood. We hope that the city will invest in higher-paying jobs, create true affordable housing, and increase access to housing vouchers for youth aging out of foster care so that they can live comfortably as adults.

### ***Supports for immigrant families***

Thank you for your leadership in establishing the Protect NYC Families initiative. During a time where many immigrant families are living in fear in this political climate, the resources that will be available through this initiative will help many of the immigrant families we serve address challenges.



### ***Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human service workers***

We once again thank City Council for its advocacy last year to secure a 3-year COLA. This was a great step in the right direction, and we look forward to more opportunities to support our frontline staff.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for taking the time to consider the needs of children and their families in our city. Together with service providers like JCCA, the city can build an infrastructure that supports young New Yorkers in achieving their goals and dreams.



**New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026  
Thursday, March 20, 2025**

**Junior Achievement of New York Testimony re: Budget & Policy Priorities**

Dear Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Betty Garger, and I am the President and CEO of Junior Achievement of New York (JA New York).

JA New York is the local affiliate of Junior Achievement USA and the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to creating pathways to economic empowerment for young people from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Our mission is to educate and inspire young people to understand the economic world around them, plan for their financial futures, and maximize their potential. We believe that knowledge and access leads to empowerment.

Last year, we provided more than 35,000 student learning experiences across the five boroughs through strategic partnerships with more than 130 NYC public schools and community-based organizations. This year, we opened our new, permanent JA Finance Park facility, which offers students a hands-on experience that focuses on budgeting, saving, and making real-world financial choices. Programs like these, and the dozens of other JA experiences we offer, are equipping young people with the tools they need to break cycles of economic hardship and build stronger financial futures.

As the City Council evaluates the preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2026, we urge you to ensure that funding for nonprofits remains a key priority. Organizations like JA New York play an essential role in helping to strengthen our communities by working with schools and educators to provide vital services that enhance what they are learning in the classroom. These experiences introduce them to new possibilities and equip them with the skills to navigate their futures successfully.

Continued support for nonprofit programs that focus on young people is an investment that extends beyond individuals; it strengthens the economic future of New York City as a whole.

We respectfully urge the City Council to continue prioritizing investments in nonprofit organizations like ours that provide critical educational services and opportunities for young people.



Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working together to prepare our young people for successful and fulfilling futures.

Sincerely,

Betty Garger  
President and CEO  
Junior Achievement of New York

**New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair**

**FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 20, 2025**

**Testimony of Danae Silkiss, Senior Program Coordinator, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS)**

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is **Danae Silkiss**, and I am the **Senior Program Coordinator** at **Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS)**, the oldest and largest nonprofit organization serving Korean-American and immigrant communities in New York City. Since 1973, KCS has worked to advance economic empowerment, social well-being, and health equity through essential programs, including adult education services that help thousands of New Yorkers gain language proficiency and access better opportunities.

There are currently over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English proficiency or without a high school diploma. Yet, fewer than 3% can access ESOL, adult basic education (ABE), or GED classes each year due to inadequate city and state funding. The crisis worsened in FY25 when the administration **cut funding for community-based adult literacy programs from \$17 million to \$12 million**—a reduction that has been maintained in the FY26 Preliminary Budget.

Compounding this crisis, **the recent dismantling of the federal Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy foreshadows potential cuts or restructuring of federal WIOA Title II funding, which currently provides \$24.6 million annually to NYC's adult literacy programs**. If eliminated, well over 20,000 students could lose access to crucial literacy education.

Given these threats, **NYCCAL calls on the administration to double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million, restoring last**

**HEADQUARTERS**  
(ADULT DAYCARE  
EDUCATION | HR IMMIGRATION |  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH  
CENTER | WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT)

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**MENTAL HEALTH  
CLINIC**

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**KCS**  
WWW.KCSNY.ORG

THE KOREAN COMMUNITY  
SERVICES OF METROPOLITAN  
NEW YORK, INC.

뉴욕한인봉사센터

**year's cuts and stabilizing these vital services. Additionally, we urge the City Council to maintain its discretionary funding for adult literacy at \$16.5 million.**

At KCS, we see firsthand the transformative power of adult literacy education. Our free ESOL and citizenship preparation classes, supported by DYCD and the New York State Office for New Americans, provide immigrants with the language and civic skills needed to access stable employment, engage in their communities, and build better futures. These programs are not optional—they are essential to the success of our city's immigrant workforce.

We urge the City Council to sustain and expand its investment in adult literacy, ensuring that no New Yorker is left behind. Thank you for your time and leadership on this issue.

**HEADQUARTERS**  
(ADULT DAYCARE)

EDUCATION | HR IMMIGRATION |  
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New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair

FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 20, 2025

**Testimony of Nicholas Kim, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Nicholas Kim, and I am the program coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS), a nonprofit organization that has served New York City's immigrant communities for over 50 years. At KCS, we provide adult literacy programs, workforce development, youth services, and social support programs to help families build better futures.

As you know, parents and caregivers play a critical role in their children's success—but when they lack access to English language classes or high school equivalency programs, their ability to support their children's education is severely limited. At KCS, we work with parents who struggle to communicate with their children's teachers, navigate the school system, or assist with homework because they do not have access to adult literacy programs. When parents succeed in the classroom, their children succeed as well.

Despite the growing demand for ESOL and GED programs, funding for adult literacy remains critically low. In FY25, the Adams administration cut funding for community-based adult literacy programs from \$17 million to \$12 million, which has been maintained in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY26. These cuts directly impact families across New York City, limiting their ability to learn English, secure stable jobs, and fully participate in their communities.

Additionally, we are deeply concerned about the potential loss of federal funding for adult education. If federal support for literacy programs is eliminated or reduced, thousands of New Yorkers will lose access to the very education that allows them to support their children's future.

HEADQUARTERS  
(ADULT DAYCARE EDUCATION |  
HR IMMIGRATION |  
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NYCCAL calls on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of all the students the Council’s Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative funding is currently serving, NYCCAL wishes to express our deepest gratitude, and **we ask the Council to maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.**

New York City cannot claim to support children and youth while ignoring the educational needs of their parents and caregivers. Investing in adult literacy strengthens entire families, ensuring that children grow up in homes where education is valued and supported. If we want to build a future where every child has a real chance at success, we must provide their families with the resources they need today.

On behalf of KCS and the families we serve, I urge the Council to prioritize sustainable funding for adult education programs in the FY26 budget.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to supporting New York City’s children and families.





**New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth  
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair**

**FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 20th, 2025**

**Testimony of Teresa Baik, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.**

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). KCS is a 52-year old social service nonprofit organization whose mission is to be a bridge for Korean immigrants and the wider Asian community to fully integrate into society and overcome any economic, health and linguistic barriers so that they become independent and thriving members of the community. We accomplish this mission by providing culturally competent programs in the areas of Aging, Education, Immigration, Workforce Development, Public Health and Mental Health. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city funding. Each year, the number of students and the number of classes have increased and is evidence of the success for our ESOL program and the constant need for adult literacy programming in our

| HEADQUARTERS<br>(ADULT DAYCARE)   | OLDER ADULT<br>CENTER   | PUBLIC HEALTH AND<br>RESEARCH CENTER (1)                            | PUBLIC HEALTH AND<br>RESEARCH CENTER (2)                              | WORKFORCE<br>DEVELOPMENT   | MENTAL HEALTH<br>CLINIC   |
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| EDUCATION   HR IMMIGRATION  <br>PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH<br>CENTER   WORKFORCE<br>DEVELOPMENT | 42-15 166th St,<br>Flushing, NY 11358<br>Tel: 718-886-8203                  | 315 5th Ave, #705,<br>New York, NY 10016<br>Tel: 212-463-9685       | 410 Broad Ave, #201,<br>Palisades Park, NJ 07650<br>Tel: 201-429-2866 | 325 West 38th St, #1107,<br>New York, NY 10018<br>Tel: 929-300-8630,<br>929-341-8302 | 42-16 162nd St, 2FL,<br>Flushing, NY 11358<br>Tel: 718-366-9540 |
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|   | 633 W 115th St,<br>New York, NY 10025<br>Tel: 718-886-8203,<br>347-923-0124 | 103-04 39th Ave, #103,<br>Corona, NY 11368<br>Tel: 917-396-4149     |   |  |   |

communities. We operate our in-person and virtual classes from Monday - Saturday with flexible class times in the morning, afternoon, and evening to best accommodate our students and their busy schedules.

In FY25 the Adams administration cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding has been maintained in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY26.

Most importantly, the Trump administration dismantled the federal Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, foreshadowing an anticipated cut, elimination, or significant restructuring of the federal funding stream, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Title II), that currently provides approximately \$24.6 million a year in ABE, GED, and ESOL funding to NYC. The loss of all of this funding would eliminate seats for well over 20,000 students.

As a result, NYCCAL calls on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of all the students the Council's Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative funding is currently

| HEADQUARTERS<br>(ADULT DAYCARE<br>EDUCATION   HR IMMIGRATION  <br>PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH<br>CENTER   WORKFORCE<br>DEVELOPMENT) | OLDER ADULT<br>CENTER   | PUBLIC HEALTH AND<br>RESEARCH CENTER (1)                            | PUBLIC HEALTH AND<br>RESEARCH CENTER (2)                              | WORKFORCE<br>DEVELOPMENT   | MENTAL HEALTH<br>CLINIC   |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| 203-05 32nd Ave,<br>Bayside, NY 11361<br>Tel: 718-939-6137   | 42-15 166th St,<br>Flushing, NY 11358<br>Tel: 718-886-8203                  | 315 5th Ave, #705,<br>New York, NY 10016<br>Tel: 212-463-9685       | 410 Broad Ave, #201,<br>Palisades Park, NJ 07650<br>Tel: 201-429-2866 | 325 West 38th St, #1107,<br>New York, NY 10018<br>Tel: 929-300-8630,<br>929-341-8302 | 42-16 162nd St, 2FL,<br>Flushing, NY 11358<br>Tel: 718-366-9540 |
|  | 37-06 111th St,<br>Corona, NY 11368<br>Tel: 718-651-9220                    | 2460 Lemoine Ave, #400P,<br>Fort Lee, NJ 07024<br>Tel: 201-364-8375 | 3556 159th St, #2nd Floor,<br>Flushing, NY 11358<br>Tel: 718-939-6137 |  |   |
|  | 633 W 115th St,<br>New York, NY 10025<br>Tel: 718-886-8203,<br>347-923-0124 | 103-04 39th Ave, #103,<br>Corona, NY 11368<br>Tel: 917-396-4149     |   |  |   |



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NEW YORK, INC.

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serving, NYCCAL wishes to express our deepest gratitude, and we ask the Council to maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.

Thank you for your attention.

**HEADQUARTERS**  
(ADULT DAYCARE)

EDUCATION | HR IMMIGRATION |  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH  
CENTER | WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT)

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**MENTAL HEALTH  
CLINIC**

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## Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

3101 Kingsbridge Terrace, Bronx, New York - 10463  
Tel: 718.884.0700 | Fax: 718.884.0858 | [www.khcc-nyc.org](http://www.khcc-nyc.org) | @khccnyc

March 19, 2025

Greetings Esteemed NYC Council Colleagues,

I am writing to ask for your support in increasing the after school base rates for SONYC programs or reissuing an RFP for COMPASS/SONYC funding to include all high need zip codes in the Bronx at the increased rate of \$5500-\$6600 per participant. The Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC) has run youth programming at our main site, and within local schools, since its inception 50 years ago. Currently, KHCC spearheads SONYC afterschool programs at its main site and at ISLA, a middle school on the Walton Educational Campus. Both programs serve as a lifeline for working parents who need to ensure their children are in a safe, supported and nurturing environment during the typically unstructured out of school hours. We provide a home away from home to youth who are learning English, young people struggling with mental health crises, teens who feel ostracized for being part of the LGBTQ community, and youth with disabilities, or simply those who need extra learning help based on academic challenges.

This year, KHCC lost its only funding source that supported after school programming for K-5th grade, ending our 50 year legacy of providing cradle to career educational support for Bronx youth. This was the result of changes to priority areas identified in the state's after school funding streams; our application to the LEAPS initiative was approved but not funded. In my 23 years at KHCC, our area of the Bronx has been left out of city/local RFP's that would help us provide free after school programming for youth in Kindergarten through 5th grade. Our local schools have not been prioritized for COMPASS programming, despite serving the same percentage of low-income families as other areas of the Bronx. This lack of local funding has also impacted our ability to provide quality summer programs for our community. The Summer Rising offering at our ISLA location has been embraced by some, but certainly not all of our families. We are desperately in need of year round funding streams that support quality programming from youth in both our center and school based locations.

Lastly, KHCC has seen an influx of youth embroiled in the justice system. We work with survivors of abuse in our Changing Futures program, but also engage youth who have caused harm via our Court Involved Youth initiative. In order to secure and retain enough graduate level social work interns to engage both of these high needs youth populations, we need to retain licensed social workers with high paying salaries and lower caseloads. An increase to the city council funds that have traditionally

supported team members with these populations, and/or supervise graduate interns is needed in order to retain and nurture qualified staff.

### **Settlement House Priorities**

This testimony will focus on recommendations that are being uplifted by all United Neighborhood House member organizations that seek to support and stabilize citywide youth services and strengthen the overall human services workforce including:

- Commit to fully funding afterschool programs by investing \$154 million this year;
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth;
- Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative;
- Reduce barriers preventing asylum seeking families from accessing youth-serving programs.

### **Commit to Fully Funding Afterschool Programs**

COMPASS/SONYC programs provide afterschool and summer programming to school-aged youth across the city. Settlement houses collectively operate 140 school-based after-school programs. COMPASS/SONYC programs have struggled in recent years with low staff wages which have led to recruitment and retention challenges, as well as vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process.

In January of 2025, afterschool providers received communication from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) that their contracts would be extended through Summer 2028. However, as with past contract extensions, this extension will include no increase to their base funding rates, leaving the program stuck with its original funding structure. The stale base funding in the face of increasingly higher costs has left programs financially unsustainable, has exacerbated the staffing shortage crisis, and jeopardizes program quality. **This disinvestment is unacceptable and the City must commit to funding higher base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to maintain the stability of NYC's afterschool system.**

**The City should increase funding to the COMPASS system by \$154,324,800 in the FY26 budget to get programs halfway to full funding.** With a forthcoming RFP, the City must add an additional \$321,974,400 in funding to the COMPASS system to achieve per participant funding rates of \$6600 and \$5500 for COMPASS Elementary and SONYC programs, respectively. Finally, we urge DYCD to work with providers to develop a plan for serving youth with disabilities in COMPASS/SONYC programs.

### **Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth**

Despite having completed four years of Summer Rising, the City has released little data on its efficacy and has not conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the model. In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this model, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released [One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families](#). With an early

restoration of summer programming for FY26, **the City should use a portion of the dedicated summer funding to pilot alternative summer programming models for middle school students.** Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them, and, if youth, parents, and staff are reporting frustration with the current model, the City should pivot to alternative models that have the potential to re-engage them. Allowing for multiple summer programming models<sup>1</sup> would also provide district-level flexibility to better serve English Language Learners and students with disabilities. In the current model, there is little room for flexibility and limited resources to provide these young people with the proper support.

### **Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative**

The COVID-19 pandemic had long-lasting effects on young people, including their mental health. During the first few months of the pandemic, 1 in 600 Black children and 1 in 700 Latinx children lost their parent or caregiver to the pandemic in New York State, more than double the rate of white children. Losing a caregiver is associated with a range of negative health effects, including lower self-esteem, a higher risk of suicide, and symptoms of mental illness. According to pediatricians, addressing the impact of family death on young people will “require intentional investment to address individual, community, and structural inequalities.” In late 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children’s Hospital Association (CHA) declared a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health; and the Surgeon General followed suit by declaring a Youth Mental Health Crisis. Furthermore, according to a 2022 survey from the Institute of Education Sciences, 69 percent of public schools reported an increase in students seeking mental health services that year, but 43 percent of schools “moderately agreed” that they could “effectively provide mental health service to all students in need.” Only 13 percent “strongly agreed.”

Given these growing mental health needs among young people, we propose using approximately \$3 million in new Council Initiative funds to create a new Youth Mental Health initiative. This new initiative would provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs – such as Beacons, Cornerstones, COMPASS/SONYC, and others—with a focus on out-of-school time. These funds could also offer support for youth workers when dealing with mental health crises, or creating proactive programming for mental health wellness.

The communities facing the highest risk for mental health concerns are the same communities who have historically lacked access to appropriate mental health services. It is generally accepted that youth mental health services are more effective when provided in a safe and trusted setting, which makes CBO-led youth programs the perfect environment for these supports. If we genuinely want to confront this crisis, it is vital that our young people have access to comprehensive mental health services that address the many stressors they are facing with substantive and professional care.



## Literacy Assistance Center

### **New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair**

### **FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing March 20, 2025**

### **Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center**

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the committee. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 42-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. I am also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

As you know, there are currently over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access adult basic education (ABE), GED, or ESOL classes in any given year.

The overwhelming majority of the New Yorkers in need of adult literacy classes are poor and working-class immigrants, women, and people of color; and while the need for adult education classes has only *grown* over the past two years, in FY25 the Adams administration inexplicably cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding has been maintained in the Mayors Preliminary Budget for FY26.



Last week, the Trump administration dismantled the federal Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, foreshadowing an anticipated cut, elimination, or significant restructuring of the federal funding stream, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Title II), that currently provides approximately \$24.6 million a year in ABE, GED, and ESOL funding to NYC. The loss of all of this funding would eliminate seats for well over 20,000 students.

According to January's Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, there were over 18,000 adults served in DYCD-funded adult literacy programs in FY24. Yet the \$12M in funding for FY25 and the proposed \$12M in funding for FY26 is slated to serve only 9,118 students, just half the number of those served in FY24. Fortunately, this year, the Council restored the administration's cuts to services through its discretionary funding. But discretionary funding is never guaranteed, and it shouldn't be incumbent upon the Council to subsidize the administration and cover for its failure to invest in core community needs.

NYCCAL calls on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of all the students the Council's Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative funding is currently serving, NYCCAL wishes to express our deepest gratitude, and **we ask the Council to maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.**

Adult literacy education provides immigrants with greater opportunities, furthers gender equity, and advances educational and racial justice. Let's demonstrate our city's steadfast commitment to these principles and refuse to leave any of our communities behind.

Thank you for your attention.



**Make the Road New York**  
**Testimony to Children & Youth Committee**  
**Mar 20, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens and Council Members. My name is Joan Kanarkiewicz and I am an Adult Education Admin Coordinator at Make the Road New York. On behalf of our 28,000+ members and staff, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share our concerns with the FY26 budget and its impact on adult education programs for immigrant New Yorkers.

Make the Road firmly believes in safeguarding dignity and fairness for all New Yorkers. Over the years, the Council has done so much to ensure that New York continues to be a city that welcomes immigrants. Part of this is ensuring that ESOL classes are available to the 2.2 million New York City residents with limited English. Yet combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access adult basic education (ABE), GED, or ESOL classes in any given year.

In the face of horrifying anti-immigrant attacks, and potential cuts to adult literacy funding at the federal level, our communities need the city's support for these programs. Unfortunately in FY25 the Adams administration inexplicably cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding has been maintained in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY26. This, combined with likely federal cuts, will be devastating.

**MRNY stands with allies in the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) in calling on the administration to double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million. We also ask the Council to maintain its discretionary funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26 for the Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative.** We are extremely grateful to the Council, as this funding is currently ensuring that many thousands of working class immigrants are getting the adult education services they need in order to help their kids succeed in school, get civically engaged, and improve their employment opportunities.

MRNY's adult education program serves over 800 adult literacy students a year. We are fortunate to have received discretionary funding this year through the Council's Adult Literacy Pilot initiative. One of our participants, who arrived in New York two years ago and did not speak English, proudly shared how the program has helped her develop English skills in order to be able to advocate for herself. At a recent medical appointment she directly communicated her needs and asked questions in English without the support of a translator. The expanded instructional hours we're able to offer through the pilot program are helping her and her classmates develop the critical language skills necessary to navigate daily life independently.

MRNY respectfully requests a renewal of \$449,000 from the adult literacy pilot, as well as \$150,000 from the initiative, to enable us to sustain our own ESOL classes to some of the most vulnerable low-income immigrant communities.

Thank you for standing up for these vital services that immigrants and working-class New Yorkers depend on.

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for FY26  
*Committee on Children and Youth, Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair*

**Testimony of New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYCETC)**

Submitted by Gregory J Morris, CEO

March 20,

My name is Gregory J Morris. I serve as CEO of the New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYCETC) - the country's largest city-based workforce development association. NYCETC serves as the 'industry voice' of more than 220 workforce development providers in New York City who are counted on to provide job training to more than 200,000 New Yorkers annually—primarily individuals living in under-resourced and underserved neighborhoods.

Today, I am highlighting the urgent need for stronger investments and systemic reforms in workforce development services for New York City's young adults.

A new report from NYCETC, *Putting Our Dollars to Work: An Analysis of NYC Workforce Funding*, reveals a troubling reality—New York City is significantly underinvesting in workforce development, especially for young adults. Although nearly \$730 million was allocated for workforce programs last year, this accounted for less than 1% of the city's budget—an amount that falls far short of what's needed to provide young people with actual pathways to economic mobility. The report makes clear that current investments are not effectively reaching young adults or creating sustainable career opportunities.

And this underinvestment is compounded by the administration's fumbling in not paying its human services contract providers on time, delaying key contract registrations, or missing deadlines to initiate its workforce programs entirely. Nothing communicates these consequential bureaucratic nightmares more boldly and sadly than the story of a workforce-providing organization whose reimbursement from the City for hundreds of thousands of services rendered was rejected because it was off by a single penny. While this may sound trivial, it is emblematic of a system so bogged down that providers cannot get paid, programs cannot operate, and young adults are left without training, internships, or jobs.

At a time when more than 1 in 5 young New Yorkers are out of work or out of school, we do not have the luxury of bureaucratic mistakes. Yet workforce organizations are owed hundreds of millions in overdue payments, with some waiting more than six months. Over half have had to take out loans just to keep their doors open, accumulating millions in unnecessary interest. That money should be used to train and employ young adults, not to cover gaps caused by the city's inaction.

Now, New York City has made strides in youth workforce investments— and that's because of the diligence and commitment of this City Council - restoring and supporting programs like Work, Learn, Grow, Out-of-School, Out-of-Work Youth initiatives, and expanding Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). These are entry points into the labor market but fall drastically short of what is needed. As the NYCETC Workforce Development Agenda makes it clear: young adults need a comprehensive, sustained approach to workforce development—not just seasonal or one-off opportunities.

The problem is two-fold: inconsistent funding and a lack of long-term career pathways. Young adults—especially those from low-income communities—need access to paid apprenticeships, industry-aligned training, and employer-driven partnerships that lead to permanent, living-wage jobs. Instead, they face fragmented programs, delayed payments to providers, and a system not designed for long-term success.

Here's the real talk:

**Our City's workforce system is not designed for long-term success.**

- Programs like Summer Youth Employment (SYEP) provide meaningful first job experiences, but young adults need year-round career pathways.
- The city's Work, Learn, Grow initiative is a step in the right direction, but it only serves a fraction of those who need it.

## **There is no clear bridge from training to careers.**

- Employers are not consistently engaged in shaping workforce programs, leading to training that does not match industry needs , especially for out-of-school and out-of-work youth who can't find a foothold in a good wage job, CUNY option, and/or apprenticeships.
- Young adults need structured and contextualized training, supportive services, and employer-driven access to growth sectors like tech, healthcare, and the green economy.

## **State and federal failures compound the problem.**

- New York State's workforce investments do not go far enough, lacking the wraparound support needed for young adults to stay in training and complete programs.
- The federal government's failure to reauthorize WIOA leaves critical workforce funding in limbo, threatening long-term training pipelines.

## **What Needs to Happen Now?**

- **Pay workforce providers on time** – Expand the Returnable Grant Fund and overhaul PASSPort so that workforce organizations are not waiting months for reimbursement.
- **Fully implement the NYCETC Workforce Development Agenda** – The city must commit to long-term workforce strategies prioritizing high-quality, employer-connected training programs for young adults.
- **Invest in real, year-round career pathways** – We need funding for sector-based training programs that provide credentials and direct hiring opportunities for young workers.
- **Push state and federal leaders to act** – Albany must fund comprehensive workforce services for young people, and Congress must reauthorize WIOA to ensure stable federal support. We will continue to push on city and state level for action.

New York City's young adults do not need symbolic commitments or delayed payments. They

need real investment, accountability, and pathways to sustainable careers. If we do not act now, we tell an entire generation their future - their economic mobility - and our City's economic growth - is an afterthought.

Thank you for your time and leadership in advancing a stronger, more equitable New York City. I look forward to continued collaboration on these critical issues.



**New York City Council  
FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Children and Youth Services Committee  
Thursday, March 20, 2025**

**Submitted on behalf of:  
New York Junior Tennis & Learning (NYJTL)  
36-36 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 504  
Long Island City, NY 11106**

**Udai Tambar  
President and CEO**

**Presented by  
Scott Daly  
Senior Director  
Community Tennis**

On behalf of New York Junior Tennis & Learning (NYJTL), I would like to thank Chair Althea Stevens, Chair Justin Brannan, and the members of both the Children and Youth Services Committee and the Finance Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2026 preliminary city budget.

As you know, for the past 50 years, the mission of NYJTL is to develop the character of young people through tennis and education for a lifetime of success on and off the court. The City of New York and the New York City Council have been close partners in accomplishing that mission and we are grateful for that support. Thank you.

With your help, today, NYJTL is the largest nonprofit youth tennis and education program in the nation, serving 90,000 K-12 NYC youth. **Funded under the Council's *Physical Education and Fitness Initiative*, NYJTL provides quality tennis, educational programming, and character development in EVERY borough throughout the city:**

**Community Tennis Program (CTP)** - Reaches children ages 5-18 throughout all FIVE boroughs year round; Provides trained coaches, tennis instruction, match play, educational services, & special events; Provides FREE tennis equipment and instruction to over 1,000 Special Population/District 75 children during the Summer; Offers educational supports, including FREE SAT Prep & FREE SHSAT Prep, as well as special Tournaments and Events, including trips to the US Open Qualifiers and to Arthur Ashe Kids Day and various pro events and tournaments.

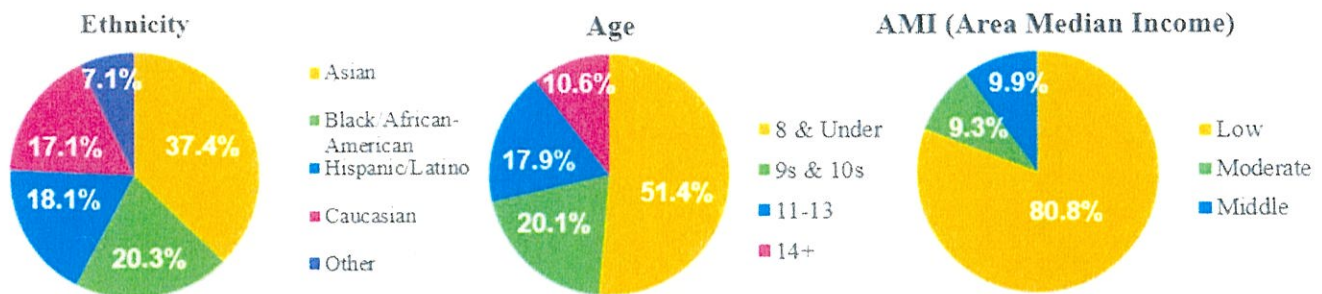
**School-Time Tennis Program (STP)** - Physical education teachers are trained by NYJTL's professionally certified coaches on how to incorporate tennis into their school's curriculum. NYJTL traditionally holds 6 training sessions each school year serving approximately 200 teachers/schools. All teachers and school-based staff are given a tennis curriculum, lesson plans, tennis equipment (rackets & balls) and ongoing onsite support if needed and requested. NYJTL is a NYSED Approved provider of Continuing Teacher & Leader Education (CTLE) credit. Training participants each receive for FREE 6.5 CTLE hours.

NYJTL also looks to expand upon our previously created CTP+ program, to relabel into two new pathway programs, the Accelerated Tennis Program and Varsity Tennis Program. These programs would allow participants who have expressed a desire for more training to get a higher level of tennis instruction.

## Impact through CTP

- Over 10,000 unique kids enrolled every year
- Over 70% of our participants are ages 10 years and younger
- 75% of youth served are Black, African-American, Latino and/or Asian
- 80% of our families report as low-income based on NYC Area Median Income
- More than 75% of our coaches are alumni of the program
- 50% of coaches are in High School or College

### CTP CITYWIDE DEMOGRAPHICS



<sup>1</sup> – Graph & Pie Charts represents CTP demographics, not the traditional 90,000 youth reached by NYJTL annually including its 30+ DYCD funded SONYC and Compass sites.

This year we are seeking **\$1M** under the Council's *Physical Education & Fitness Initiative* – an increase of \$200,000. **If allocated, it would be our first increase in 17 years.** In 2008 our citywide funding was reduced by 1/3 from \$1.2M to \$800,000 to fill a Mayoral created budget hole at DOE.

Funding of **\$1M** will enable us to:

- Keep up with rising staffing costs due to NYJTL's **minimum wage of \$18 (above NYC minimum)**
- Allow us to purchase sufficient equipment and cover additional site costs (permits/indoor court time)
- Allow us to bring programming to **NEW LOCATIONS** throughout the city
- Allow us to bring **ADDITIONAL HOURS** of free tennis instruction at existing sites
- **INCREASE SATURDAY** programming to increase access for kids who cannot attend during the weekdays
- **INCREASE ENROLLMENT** throughout the city as a result of additional program hours and new locations

The City of New York and the New York City Council have been close partners in helping us accomplish our mission to and that of NYJTL's founder, Arthur Ashe, who believed tennis could transform the lives of poor children of color just as it had his own life.

We could not do what we do without the strong funding support of the New York City Council. With your support, we can continue to change the lives of thousands of New York City youth and their families.

On behalf of the youngsters and parents served by NYJTL, I thank you for the Council's commitment to the youth of our city and for your sustained support of NYJTL.



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*\*Former Board President*

March 18, 2025

New York City Council  
City Hall Park  
New York, NY 10007

Dear New York City Council,

New Yorkers For Children (NYFC) is a non-profit organization that works to improve the well-being of people in the child welfare system, with a focus on youth aging out of foster care. We provide educational, mental health, and financial support to over 1,000 youth annually, while also developing innovative initiatives to fill gaps in the system. We do this through our long-standing partnership with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), foster care agencies, and many community organizations.

Thank you to the City Council for the \$50,000 award this current fiscal year, which is further enabling us to promote the well-being of youth who have experienced foster care. For the upcoming fiscal year, NYFC is respectfully requesting that the City Council renew our award as well as include NYFC in the Wrap Around Support for Transitional-Aged Foster Youth initiative for a \$100,000 funding commitment. Additional resources are crucial for NYFC to support our clients in more comprehensive ways, leading to increased educational attainment, mental wellness, and career development for youth aging out.

The need for wraparound supports for youth who have aged out of foster care is paramount, especially vis-à-vis mental health. According to the 2021 Youth Experiences Survey conducted by ACS, nearly 50% of youth surveyed said they felt down, depressed, or hopeless at least 1-5 days in the past two weeks, a figure nearly 10 times higher than the national U.S. rate of depression among adults. Likewise, a study in the journal *Mental Health Connect* found that youth who have been in foster care "experience mental health challenges at much higher rates than their peers." As many of the youth we serve are students in college, fostering mental well-being is critical to helping them stay on track to graduation.

To intervene in the drivers of these grim statistics, NYFC provides free mental health support from credentialed staff that facilitate healing and growth. Because many of the young people we serve have experienced overlapping traumas on the individual and systemic levels, we emphasize hiring qualified staff with advanced degrees in counseling and related areas who are committed to building non-hierarchical relationships with young people and to fostering their growth.

Aside from direct mental health support, NYFC is also committed to alleviating the root causes of poverty many youth face with emergency cash support. In tandem with our counseling services, cash support is essential to fostering youth well-being and helping them surmount crises that might otherwise disrupt their lives.

Overall, an investment by the City Council in NYFC means an investment in youth and families in the child welfare system in New York City. Our commitment to strengthening channels to post-secondary programs, college, and careers, particularly for students on alternative pathways to graduation, is instrumental in ensuring our city's young people aging out of foster care are not overlooked, and therefore creating more equitable outcomes overall.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Yu".

Alan Yu  
Executive Director



## The Critical Role of New York Edge at Brownsville Academy

My name is Aaliyah Clark, and I am a 12th-grade student at Brownsville Academy High School. I am writing to share my perspective on why New York Edge is an indispensable partner for our school and why sustaining their funding is so essential.

New York Edge is more than just a partner—they are a lifeline for our community. They provide extensive support that touches every aspect of our school life:

- Academic & Career Support:

New York Edge organizes college tours and hosts numerous events and workshops. They assist with post-secondary college applications, career readiness, cover letter and resume writing, and even offer CPR training and language support through tools like Rosetta Stone. Their guidance helps us prepare effectively for our future.

- Emotional & Mental Health Support:

Their support extends to our mental well-being by offering workshops for parents and providing resources that ensure we have a stable and caring environment both in and out of school.

- Practical & Financial Assistance:

They supply our school with a well-stocked pantry that includes food, clothes, school supplies, and hygiene products—essentials that many students frequently rely on. Additionally, the laundry room is always equipped with detergent. New York Edge also funds school trips, supports students with resources like glasses and dental care, and even provides a breakfast club every day.

This comprehensive support system makes our experience at Brownsville Academy more engaging and less stressful. It enables us to focus on our studies and personal growth while knowing that practical needs are met.

Given the wide-ranging benefits that New York Edge brings to our school community, I truly believe that maintaining and increasing funding for their programs—and for the new buildings they help sustain—is absolutely necessary. Their contributions not only improve our academic performance but also enrich our overall well-being, making our journey through high school a more fulfilling and supported experience.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider the importance of New York Edge to our school community. I am hopeful that with continued support, these invaluable services will remain available to all students.

Sincerely,

Aaliyah Clark

Brownsville Academy High School

12th Grade



*newyorkedge.org*

**NYC Council FY 26  
Preliminary Budget Hearings –**

**Education Committee  
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair**

**Children & Youth Committee  
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Health Committee  
Hon. Lynn Schulman Chair**

*Submitted by Rachael Gazdick, CEO*

Thank you Madame Chairs and Members of the Committees for the Council's long standing support of **New York Edge (NYE)** and our mission of bridging the opportunity gap among students in underinvested communities.

**With the Council as our partner these past 33 years, we have grown from a small, wrap-around summer program to the LARGEST provider of after-school and summer programming in New York City.** On behalf of the 33,000 00 students served by New York Edge in over 100 schools throughout the five boroughs, I ask for your help as we seek increased funding in the upcoming budget in alignment with our impact and scale. Increased funding will also help mitigate some of the challenges which have occurred as a result of the city's Passport System (causing significant reimbursement/payment delays).

**Our Council Citywide funding has remained at \$1M for the past 15 years despite the fact that we have tripled in size and have significantly increased the number of children served.** To continue providing this level of service and to meet the growing demands placed on us, especially as we are often asked to step in to provide programming and services when other organizations are struggling, I ask that that our Council Citywide funding reflect this expansion and that you support our FY 26 funding requests:

- **\$1.2M under the Council's After-School Enrichment Initiative - an increase of approximately \$200,000 over our FY 25 allocation.**
- **\$250,000 under the Council's Social & Emotional Supports for Students Initiative. We are, as identified by Mosaic by ACT, the largest after-school provider in the nation providing SEL supports.**

New York Edge was created 33 years ago at the suggestion of the New York City Council to provide free wrap-around summer camps for youngsters attending summer school. At that time such camps, which provided sports and arts activities as well as academic help, did not



exist. With the Council as its partner, New York Edge was at the forefront of the movement to provide free summer camp programming to our city's youth.

Our Education Team, comprised of educators with expertise in curriculum, professional coaching, and program development with a focus on leadership, integrated technologies, literacy and STEAM, take learning beyond the traditional classroom walls. **Core components of New York Edge programming include:**

- **STEM Education**
- **Social Emotional Learning and Leadership**
- **Visual & Performing Arts**
- **Sports, Health & Wellness**
- **Academics and College & Career Readiness**
- **Summer Programs**

Through its partnership and support, the Council is helping young New Yorkers discover their interests, their passions, and their joys, building pathways to careers and trades that will provide financial security throughout their lives – and in the process creating connections to each other, to teachers, mentors, and their communities. **TOGETHER, we are guiding students so that they grow up healthy, happy and empowered. TOGETHER, we are creating the next generation of active and productive community members and problem solvers. TOGETHER, we are creating New York City's next generation of doctors, mechanics, chefs, writers, engineers, entrepreneurs and SO MUCH MORE.**

The proof of our success and impact is in our numbers:

- **98%** of New York Edge parents agree that their child feels a sense of belonging;
- **98%** of New York Edge parents agree that their child feels able to approach program staff for help with academics or social matters;
- **94.4%** of New York Edge parents would recommend New York Edge to other parents;

- **18%** improvement was made in ELA and Math scores after New York Edge tutoring;
- **96.8%** of New York Edge parents agree that New York Edge is helping to prepare their child for future success in

All of us at New York Edge is are proud to serve New York City's K-12 students of all ages, races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our offerings are culturally relevant programs, tailored to students' needs and interests, and rooted in social-emotional learning. **SEL is integrated into every element of our programming.**

Our model for aiding social emotional learning includes robust academic and personal wellness support, and trauma-informed strategies. We blend the critical elements that support an appreciation of cultural diversity with the core SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, social capital and decision-making into all academic curriculum and extracurricular activities. **We are, as identified by Mosaic by ACT, the largest after-school provider in the nation offering SEL supports.**

New York Edge school-based programs run before or after the school day, year-round (including Saturdays, over the summer, and holiday periods). Council citywide funding under the ***After-School Enrichment Initiative*** enables us to enrich and expand our programming throughout the city and has allowed us to develop and implement unique and engaging programs such as:

- ***FORMATIVE*** – our nationally recognized student led podcast and winner of the prestigious Anthem Community Voice Award in the Education, Art, and Culture - Podcast or Audio category. *Formative* connects middle school students with diverse leaders and role models for conversations on important topics including childhood, personal growth and careers. The podcase empowers students to develop their skills in research, public speaking and interviewing.
- **Book Publishing Program** – New York Edge students across the city, in collaboration with award-winning children's book author Jesse Byrd and a roster of professional illustrators,

write and publish their own stories, gaining joy and insight into the creating writing process and strengthening literacy skills along the way.

- ***Heart for Art*** – an arts education program powered by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and DHL Express. Designed to inspire children in communities with limited access to cultural education with the art and life story of Vincent Van Gogh, this program engaged 20 teachers across five NYC schools when it was launched in spring 2022. As of September 2022, the program has expanded to 10 NYC school with more on the horizon. Through this innovative arts education program, students have, through the study of Van Gogh’s life and work, received inspiration for their own creative pursuits.
- **Read Across New York Edge** – our new exciting literacy initiative launched last year. During the first week in March, over 50 acclaimed children’s book authors visited schools across the city to read and share their love of storytelling with New York Edge students. As part of the Read Across New York Edge curriculum, students will spent time reading and engaging in creating projects centered around the themes of participating authors books.

**Sustained Council funding through the years has also enabled us to become one of the city’s largest providers of college access programs.**

Funding under the ***Social & Emotional Supports for Students*** Initiative will enable us to support our current SEL programming providing high quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning assessments, curriculum and resources to all of our partner schools, the students we serve and their families.

New York Edge, its students, and families are extraordinarily grateful for the past 33 years of support from the New York City Council. **The time has come, however, where increased funding is VITALLY needed.** Unlike contracts with DYCD and other agencies, Council discretionary contracts are not (and have never been) eligible for COLA increases. This is making it increasingly difficult for New York Edge to attract and maintain quality staff and to

continue to offer the wide array of STEM, SEL, Visual & Performing Arts, Sports, Health & Wellness and College & Career Readiness programs that we are known for.

We are now looking to you to meet the needs of the next generation of young people by supporting our FY 26 citywide funding requests. **These funds will enable us to keep providing youth throughout the city with the edge they need to succeed!**

Thank you.



Good day members of the City Council Committee on Education,

My name is Trinity Williams, and I'm an 8th-grade student who participates in **New York Edge** afterschool programming at Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School. I'm here today because after-school programs are not just extra activities they are necessary. They give students like me a place to feel safe, stay motivated, and discover what we're capable of.

I'll be honest when the last bell rings, a lot of kids don't want to just go straight home. Not because we don't love our families, but because we want to be around our friends, learn new things, and have experiences we wouldn't get anywhere else. After-school programs give us that.

For example, I've been involved in STEM, Cosmetology, Sports, Leadership, Art, and STEP through my **New York Edge** after-school program. Each one has helped me grow in different ways. STEM showed me how creative science can be, Cosmetology taught me about self-care and confidence, Sports pushed me to work harder, Leadership made me speak up, Art let me express myself, and STEP gave me a sense of teamwork and rhythm.

And it's not just about what we do in the building we also get to experience things outside of school. We take fun trips that open our eyes to new opportunities. One of my proudest moments happened because of my **New York Edge** after-school program. Back in December, I was nominated to play in the girls' league at MetLife Stadium. At first, I didn't even want to go I doubted myself. But when I stepped onto that field, it changed everything. Seeing my face on the jumbo screen, knowing my mom was in the stands so proud of me, I realized I was capable of more than I thought. That moment might not have happened without New York Edge.

After-school programs don't just keep kids busy. They help us find our passions, build confidence, and make memories that stay with us forever. They also help parents who work late know that their kids are in a safe, positive place instead of home alone or out in the streets.

I know funding isn't always easy, but investing in **New York Edge** after-school programs means investing in students like me. We are the future of this city, and the support we get now will shape the kind of people we become.

So please, continue to support and fund **New York Edge**. It truly makes a difference.

Thank you,

Trinity Williams

Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School

8<sup>th</sup> Grade



New York  
Public  
Library



QUEENS  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
FISCAL YEAR 2026 PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING  
March 20, 2025**

The three library systems of New York City, Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library (serving the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island), and Queens Public Library, are grateful to the New York City Council for their ongoing support of City's First Readers. We would like to thank Speaker Adams, Committee Chair Stevens, and the committee members for their support and for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Preliminary Budget.

Due to the generous support of the Council through the City's First Readers initiative, NYC libraries have been able to expand services and innovate new programs in support of young children, parents, caregivers, and early educators since 2014. Attendance at NYC library programs for young children surpassed 850,000 last year—a 30% increase over the previous fiscal year. The three library systems are on track to build on this milestone this year. Here are some highlights of the work each library system engages in with City's First Readers resources:

- **Brooklyn Public Library (BPL)** offered Ready, Set, Kindergarten, a school readiness storytime, at a third of our branches—a 40% increase in programming from the previous year. Our Early Childhood Symposium on Early Literacy and the Science of Reading was attended by over 350 people. BPL offered storytimes in 10 languages, including Brainy Babies, an infant/toddler storytime rich with parent resources. The library offered workshops on early literacy and balancing screen time at preschools, pre-K programs, and child care centers throughout the borough.
- **New York Public Library (NYPL)** distributed 12,000 English/Spanish/Chinese early literacy outreach kits, increased multilingual programming at 50 branches through "Little Learner" series across all three boroughs, increased early childhood outreach efforts into pediatric clinics & shelters, created new early literacy spaces at 10 libraries and offered robust staff professional development.
- **Queens Public Library (QPL)** reached families and adult caregivers through in-person and virtual programming in 9 languages, provided outreach via a mobile bus for school visits and events, PreK STEM Storytimes, QPL Baby programs for expectant and new parents/caregivers, distributed QPL Baby Kits to hospital partners, hosted Toddler Learning Center at 28 locations, piloted 1000 Books Before Kindergarten at 12 locations, offered Kick Off to Kindergarten in both virtual and in-person sessions, provided Early



learning Specialists at 4 locations, added the Lantern texting service for early literacy and parenting tips for children up to age 11, professional development opportunities for early learning staff, created 9 early learning spaces, and hosted CFR month book giveaways and programming at 7 locations.

City's First Readers has also allowed libraries to collaborate with initiative partners in unique ways. **Literacy Inc.** teams up with libraries to provide storytimes in low-resourced neighborhoods, **Reach Out and Read** and NYPL created literacy-rich waiting areas in pediatric clinics, **JCCA** and BPL offer library cards and storytimes to foster families.

We are grateful for the long-running support of the Council for the City's First Readers initiative spanning over a decade. This year, City's First Readers is requesting a \$1 million enhancement—a modest but critical increase that will be shared across our 17 partner organizations. A significant portion of this funding will go toward expanding our capacity to serve newly arrived families by providing translated and culturally aligned materials. Whether it's a bilingual board book that becomes a toddler's source of comfort or a packet of resources that helps a parent navigate life in a new city, these materials are essential to creating stability and connection. Yet, the cost of books and printed materials has skyrocketed due to inflation, tariffs, and supply chain disruptions. We need this investment to ensure that books and educational resources remain accessible—not a luxury.

New York City cannot claim to be a leader in education while failing to meet the basic learning needs of our youngest children. We urge the Council to renew and enhance its support for City's First Readers. The need has never been greater, and the time to act is now.

Our libraries are the first social and educational experience many young families have, and we want it to be truly literacy-rich. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.







## The New York City Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony March 20, 2025

The stakes for early childhood education in New York City have never been higher. At a time when research confirms that 90% of a child's brain development happens by age five, we cannot afford to underfund the programs that shape their futures. The Council has fought hard in past budget cycles to protect early childhood education from devastating cuts, yet here we are again—fighting just to maintain the status quo when the need has never been greater. This year, we must go beyond defense. We must ensure that every child—particularly those affected by poverty and systemic inequities and injustice—has access to the critical early learning experiences that prevent educational inequities, counteract the effects of trauma, and set them on a path toward lifelong success. Anything less is a failure to invest in the very foundation of our city's future.

The demand for early childhood programs has only grown, fueled by rising economic hardship, homelessness, a mental health crisis, and an influx of migrant families seeking stability and opportunity. Yet, instead of expanding access to meet this need, we are once again being asked to defend the bare minimum. The Council must not allow itself to be drawn into a debate about merely restoring funding to last year's levels. If we want to give every child in New York City a fair start, we must fully fund and expand early childhood education now.

I am Nicole Kesoglides, representing PlayReadVIP at New York University, one of 17 partner organizations that make up City's First Readers (CFR)—the Council's only early literacy initiative. Together, we deliver early childhood education programming across every Council district, ensuring that families have access to critical early learning opportunities. Our work is not just about books—it's about building strong foundations for children's academic success, emotional well-being, and long-term stability.

There is a direct connection between our services and the work of this Committee on Immigration. The families we serve include thousands of newly arrived children—many of whom have faced extraordinary hardship. Science has confirmed what early literacy advocates have long known: early learning experiences, particularly those rooted in language and literacy, are powerful tools for countering the effects of trauma. Research on brain development shows that by age 3, a child's brain is already 80% formed; by age 5, it's 90% developed. These early years are the most critical window for learning, and they determine how well a child will be prepared for school and beyond. The reality is simple: if we fail to invest in early childhood education now, we set children up for failure later.

As the Mayor has often said, it is far more effective—and cost-effective—to support children upstream. Early intervention reduces the need for costly remedial services later on. The children we serve, particularly migrant children, have often experienced severe trauma in their origin country, on their journey to the USA, or after their arrival—exposure to violence, food insecurity, family separation, and instability. These experiences can have long-lasting consequences on their ability to learn and thrive. But research also shows that consistent reading routines with a caring adult can provide stability, build trust, and help children develop the critical pre-literacy skills that will shape their future success. This is the work City's First Readers partners do every day.

There is no question that New York City's safety net is being strained by the surge of migrant families. But that is not an excuse to neglect our responsibility to all children. City's First Readers organizations remain unwavering in our commitment to serve every child, including new arrivals. We are on the frontlines, ensuring that all families—regardless of their immigration status—have access to the educational support they need.



# City's First Readers

An initiative of the New York City Council

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[www.citysfirstreaders.com](http://www.citysfirstreaders.com)

Our specific role at New York University as a partner in this coalition is for PlayReadVIP. PlayReadVIP is a rigorously-studied parenting intervention that has been empirically shown to improve school readiness and help close poverty related achievement gaps. At well-baby pediatric visits, families meet with a PlayReadVIP interventionist who videotapes the parent and child to reinforce positive interactions during play and reading. At each of these sessions, parents are also given a developmentally-appropriate toy and/or book to keep in order to build these skills at home. Visits are available in-person and/or remotely via telehealth. PlayReadVIP is available at no cost to families in NYC who are receiving pediatric care for their infant or young child at multiple locations across the city. PlayReadVIP, and other early childhood programs, can help families cope with stressors of parenting, reduce maternal depressive symptoms, reduce early harsh discipline that can lead to child maltreatment, and prevent child behavior problems that interfere with learning.

This year, City's First Readers is requesting a \$1 million enhancement—a modest but critical increase that will be shared across our 17 partner organizations. A significant portion of this funding will go toward expanding our capacity to serve newly arrived families by providing translated and culturally aligned materials. Whether it's a bilingual board book that becomes a toddler's source of comfort or a packet of resources that helps a parent navigate life in a new city, these materials are essential to creating stability and connection. Yet, the cost of books and printed materials has skyrocketed due to inflation, tariffs, and supply chain disruptions. We need this investment to ensure that books and educational resources remain accessible—not a luxury.

New York City cannot claim to be a leader in education while failing to meet the basic learning needs of our youngest children. We urge the Council to fully fund City's First Readers and approve this enhancement. The need has never been greater, and the time to act is now

Submitted by

Nicole Kesoglides

Project Manager

New York University

[Nicole.Kesoglides@nyulangone.org](mailto:Nicole.Kesoglides@nyulangone.org)



**New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents**

**Testimony before the Committee on Children and Youth  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 20, 2025**

**Presented by  
Allison Hollihan, Director  
New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents**



New York Initiative for  
**Children of Incarcerated Parents**

*A project of Osborne Association*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Allison Hollihan, the Director for the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP). Since 2006, Osborne Association has coordinated this statewide partnership of over 60 government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and families who have experienced parental incarceration.

I am here on behalf of this partnership to highlight the need for City agencies to make policy and practice changes, and implement cross-system collaborations to better support the one in 14 children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent. In 2019, **approximately one in five NYC DOE high school students reported experiencing parental incarceration on the DOHMH Youth Risk Behavior Survey**. Due to the systemic racism in the criminal legal system, children of color experience parental incarceration at higher rates: 1 in 4 Black children and 1 in 10 Hispanic children, compared to 1 in 25 white children.<sup>1</sup>

Parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), one of ten childhood traumas that are linked to toxic stress, altered brain development, and long-term negative health and mental health outcomes. Children who experience the arrest and incarceration of a loved one are also more likely than other children to experience violence in their communities and at home.<sup>2</sup>

For all of the reasons I have outlined, it is imperative that the City takes steps to promote protective factors to support children's well-being including cross-systems collaboration, data collection, outcomes analysis with a racial equity lens, and dedicated funding for supportive services.

In 2010, NYCIP coordinated the first-ever statewide summit examining the needs and experiences of New York State's children with incarcerated parents. The Summit led to the issuing of a [report](#) that provided recommendations for relevant government agencies, including law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and children-serving agencies. While some of the report's 87 recommendations have since been implemented, most of the unaddressed recommendations remain relevant today. In 2016, we issued another [report](#) for child welfare outlining recommendations needed within this field and, specifically, for children in foster care.

<sup>3</sup> Today, I will highlight some of these key recommendations:

- 1. Funding for community-based organizations to provide tailored services to support children of arrested and incarcerated parents.**

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<sup>1</sup> Wildeman C. Parental Imprisonment, the Prison Boom, and the Concentration of Childhood Disadvantage. Demography. 2009 May.

<sup>2</sup> In an analysis of the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health data, 20.3% of children of incarcerated parents experienced community violence, compared to 2.3% of children who had never experienced parental incarceration.

<sup>3</sup> Additional information including the Summit report, child welfare report, and handbooks on serving children of incarcerated parents can be found on the Osborne website: [www.osborneny.org](http://www.osborneny.org)

Osborne is grateful to have received City Council funding in the past to implement Administrative Code §14-181, which requires NYPD to safeguard children present during an arrest and provide families with information about community-based services to help children process the arrest of a parent. Through this funding, Osborne provided technical assistance and training for eleven community-based organizations that provide critical mental health services to NYC's children and families. It is critical to expand this network of providers and dedicate City funding to support ongoing training for clinicians to meet the unique needs of children affected by a parent's arrest and incarceration throughout the City. This should include, but not be limited to, dedicated funding for afterschool programs, Beacon and Cornerstone Community Centers, Runaway and Homeless Youth services, Youth Workforce Development programs, Fatherhood programs, Family Support programs, Immigrant Services, and Youth Workforce Development programs, including the Summer Youth Employment Program, to serve children of incarcerated parents.

## **2. Supporting children's relationships with parents incarcerated on Rikers Island**

We applaud the City Council for passing the package of Riker's visiting bills on March 11, 2025, to improve visiting procedures and transparency in New York City jails. To improve the experience of children visiting Rikers Island, it is critical for these bills to be implemented with input from community-based organizations with experience serving children and families, and visiting Rikers. Osborne has decades of experience in child-friendly visiting practices and was a key member of the Riker's Visiting Workgroup that also included DOC central staff and uniformed staff involved in the visiting process. This workgroup accomplished numerous concrete improvements but it has not met in the three years since it was disrupted by COVID and changes in DOC leadership. We recommend that this workgroup resume to ensure proper implementation of the recently passed visiting bills and improve the experience of the thousands of children who visit Rikers every year.

Osborne is one of two providers currently offering visiting support and assistance to children and their parents who are incarcerated at Rose M. Singer and Otis Bantum Correctional Center on Rikers Island. It is imperative for the City to expand funding to ensure that these services, including parenting classes, visit coaching, individual counseling, and family court advocacy, are made available to all parents on Rikers Island. We are also very concerned about the reduction in programs, including family-focused reentry, available to those incarcerated on Rikers Island. It seems DOC is unable to meet the required minimum of 5 hours of programming, and with high vacancy staffing rates it is imperative that funding be restored to community-based providers to deliver these critical services. The recently issued RFPs are very important and needed, but do not fund the same services as those that were cut close to 2 years ago.

We urge DOC to not only implement child-friendly visiting practices but also to increase

children's access to their parents on Rikers Island. Video visiting is a great supplement to in-person visits and currently DOC offers video visits (i.e., televisits) on Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. We urge DOC to expand video visiting to include weekend and evening hours so that children and families do not have to miss school and work to video visit. The ACS Children of Incarcerated Parents program facilitates visits for children with an open ACS case and their incarcerated parents, which is critical for families working towards reunification, or another permanency goal. However, post-COVID, Rikers only allows the ACS CHIPP program to bring children to Rikers on Tuesdays, a school day, and we urge DOC to reinstate Saturday visits for the CHIPP program.

### **3. Collecting data on how many children experience the arrest or incarceration of a parent is needed to inform service delivery and cross-systems collaboration.**

It is long past time to address the fact that we do not know how many children in New York City are present at a parent's arrest or experience the incarceration of a parent. Having this data would allow for cross-systems collaboration and coordination with criminal justice agencies, staff training, and tailoring best practices to this particular circumstance. Taking steps to identify and support these children promotes child and family wellbeing, setting children up for success rather than costly involvement in the mental health, child welfare, homeless, or criminal legal systems.

We applaud the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Department of Education for including parental incarceration in the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in 2017 and 2019. This data tells us that one in four high school students residing in the Bronx, and one in five high school students residing in Brooklyn and Staten Island, have had an incarcerated parent. It is vital that this question be included in future surveys to inform funding decisions, service needs, and to better equip professionals to address challenges students are facing that may contribute to disparate outcomes. However, even more robust, community-level data is needed.

Over the past four years, Osborne has urged the NYPD Office of Collaborative Policing to strengthen NYPD's data collection efforts about children present during a parent or caregiver's arrest. Knowing the number of children present and their ages would ensure adequate and targeted community-based resources are available. We were told that adding a check box to the Aided Card would be a lengthy process that the NYPD was not willing to undertake unless required by law. We urge the Council to introduce a bill requiring NYPD to collect this data.

Despite decades of providers and advocates calling for data, we still do not know how many children in foster care have an incarcerated parent, which could result in the foster care provider agency not meeting their legally mandated reasonable and diligent efforts. It is essential that ACS provider agencies determine and document whether a parent is incarcerated, and if so, take steps to engage the parent, guided by what is in the child's best interest and the law that requires reasonable efforts, including in-person visits. Knowing that a parent is incarcerated allows for service providers to better support children's relationships with their parents, provide children

with services to process this unique form of loss, and promote positive outcomes for children. Within child welfare, some policies do exist to uphold the rights and meet the needs of these children, but data collection mechanisms are needed to monitor compliance with existing policies and to track outcomes.

**4. We recommend that ACS and its provider agencies take steps to better support children of arrested and incarcerated parents in preventive and foster care programs.** This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ▶ Strengthen the ability of automated, integrated, secure information systems to capture and aggregate data about parental incarceration. Implement internal identification and tracking mechanisms.
- ▶ Note parental incarceration in family and child service plans.
- ▶ Monitor and document compliance with policies and practices regarding children of incarcerated parents in provider agency performance reviews and corrective action plans.
- ▶ Deliver ongoing staff training about practices that support children of incarcerated parents and an overview of the criminal legal system.
- ▶ Designate provider agency point persons who have expertise working with incarcerated parents and navigating the criminal legal system.

**5. Children of Incarcerated Parents should be considered as a priority population for the Summer Youth Employment Program.**

National research and data collected by the NYC DOHMH<sup>4</sup> finds that parental incarceration is associated with lower school readiness, increased instability, poor mental health outcomes, and higher rates of tobacco and drug use. Families of the incarcerated are also more likely to experience poverty, with nearly 65% of families with an incarcerated member unable to meet their family's basic needs.<sup>5</sup> Ensuring that children of incarcerated parents are prioritized for SYEP will mean they have opportunities to build their career readiness skills and earn income to meet their basic needs.

**6. The Interagency Coordinating Council on Youth (ICC) should implement a children of incarcerated parents working group** to improve the effectiveness of all youth-serving agencies to meet the unique needs of children of arrested and incarcerated parents.

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<sup>4</sup> Khan S, Baquero M, Davila, M. Parental Incarceration and Well-Being among Adolescents in New York City Public High Schools. NYC Vital Signs, 2021, 19(3); 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015.

It is distressing that City agencies are not aware of the tens of thousands of children who are feeling isolated, alone, and stigmatized because of their parent's arrest or incarceration; distressing that many children who want to visit their parents cannot do so due to lack of resources and lack of programs to bring them to visits; it is distressing that child-serving staff are not trained to meet these children's unique needs, nor can they competently answer families' questions about the criminal legal system; and it is distressing that we continue to have visiting policies and practices at City jails that are traumatizing to children.

It is imperative that the needs and experiences of children of incarcerated parents are considered and recognized by every City agency that serves children and families, and those that arrest, detain, prosecute, sentence, and supervise parents. Too often, these children are not considered during policy development or program design and implementation, and the workforce is ill-equipped to meet their needs. The recommended working group should inventory City agencies' existing policies and practices, and revise or create policies to safeguard children consistent with the *Children of Incarcerated Parents' Bill of Rights*. The working group should explore how best to equip the workforce with language and strategies for creating affirming spaces that make families comfortable to disclose that they are navigating a parent's involvement in the criminal legal system from the point of a parent's arrest through reentry. NYCIP welcomes the opportunity to present on this issue at an upcoming ICC meeting.

Please note that the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents issues monthly email updates and convenes quarterly. We welcome Councilmembers or your staff to attend. Please contact me at [ahollihan@osborneny.org](mailto:ahollihan@osborneny.org) for details.

Thank you.



**The Osborne Association  
New York City Council  
FY26 Discretionary Funding Requests**

| <b>Program</b>   | <b>Description</b>  | <b>FY26 Request</b> | <b>FY25 Funding</b> |
|--|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Services (Ref. 194457)</b>              | Osborne’s portion of the ATI coalition request, which will support multiple programs: (1) court advocacy and mitigation services; (2) video visiting and family strengthening activities; (3) expansion of job training and placement; (4) elder reentry services; and (5) the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations. | \$2,052,074         | \$1,852,074         |
| <b>Bronx Osborne Gun Accountability and Prevention Program - BOGAP (Ref: 193844)</b> | To support BOGAP—an innovative diversion program developed with the Bronx DA—to serve approximately 75 participants annually. Funds will be used to provide hot meals to program participants, stipends for internships, and additional support services to participants to increase their chances of success in the program. | \$20,000            | \$20,000            |
| <b>Elder Reentry Initiative Services and Advocacy (Ref: 194063)</b>                  | To support two related program areas: (1) The Elder Reentry Initiative’s participant screening, intake and assessment, reentry service plans, community case management, and technical assistance; and (2) Osborne’s advocacy and public education on behalf of older adults.   | \$125,000           | \$90,000            |

|  |  |           |           |
|--|--|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Health and Wellness<br/>– Ending the<br/>Epidemic (Ref.<br/>193984)</b>           | To support formerly incarcerated people who are living with or at high risk of contracting HIV and come from low-income communities of color, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ people. Osborne will provide sexual health education, prevention/treatment, trauma support, and other supportive services.  | \$110,000 | \$104,325 |
| <b>Safeguarding<br/>Children Initiative<br/>(Ref: 193568)</b>                        | To support the work of Local Law 1349-A, enacted to reduce trauma to children when NYPD arrests the parent of a child. Osborne will provide necessary training and administrative support to the NYPD, and engage and train a network of CBOs that can provide post-arrest support to children.  | \$300,000 | \$265,000 |
| <b>Improving<br/>Behavioral Health<br/>and Wellbeing for<br/>Youth (Ref: 194209)</b> | For assessing and addressing mental health and trauma in youth impacted by the criminal legal system through treatment options that alleviate stress, improve functioning, and reduce trauma symptoms. Targets: 60 assessments; 120 referrals.   | \$158,000 | \$158,000 |
| <b>Kinship Reentry<br/>Housing Initiative<br/>(Ref. 194304)</b>                      | To sustain and expand the <i>Kinship Reentry Housing Program</i> , which provides financial assistance, case management, and peer support to families housing a loved one returning from incarceration. By addressing economic and logistical barriers to stable reentry housing, the program reduces reliance on the shelter system, strengthens family reunification, and lowers the risk of recidivism. | \$250,000 | N/A       |

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Good afternoon. My name is Robin Veenstra-VanderWeele and I am the Associate Executive Director of Youth Services for Queens Community House. I am here today to talk about a crisis for community-based organizations (CBOs) like ours regarding the funding provided for after-school programs across the city.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) COMPASS/SONYC funded programs provide afterschool and summer programming to thousands of school-aged youth across the city. These hours of learning and growth are an essential investment in equity for our youth and also provide the critical childcare that working families need in the afterschool and summer hours.

In January of 2025, afterschool providers received communication from the DYCD that their current COMPASS/SONYC contracts would be extended through Summer 2028. While this is good news for the current providers across the city to see contract extensions, it is a devastating blow to see extensions at the same rate per participant that we agreed to over a decade ago. This contract extension will include not increase to the rate per participant, leaving the programs across the city stuck with a funding formula that has not kept up with inflation or the actual cost of running an afterschool program in 2025, much less in 2028.

Today, over 60% of the city's COMPASS contracts provide a rate per participant of \$2,800 per participant. In order to assess the true costs of providing after-school services that meet both the contractual requirements of DYCD and the real needs of children and youth in this post-pandemic era, United Neighborhood Houses engaged in a city-wide assessment of how providers are funding their after-school programs and what are the costs that are not covered by contracts with DYCD. Based on this assessment, the City should increase COMPASS Elementary programs from \$2,800 to \$6,600 per participant, and SONYC Middle School programs should shift from \$3,200 to \$5,500 per participant.

In response to the recent contract renewals, a coalition of community-based providers from across the city came together to affirm that the contract renewals with no increase to the budgets were unacceptable and putting the sector at risk. We signed and delivered a petition to city hall. Today we are raising this alarm for City Council. Non-profits cannot continue to work under terms agreed to over a decade ago. The financial gap between what the DYCD contracts cover and CBOs costs for these programs is growing each year. Organizations struggle to find other sources of funds to cover that gap or often take a financial loss to fulfill our missions. We cannot afford to keep this up.

Our ask as a sector is to meet us halfway to the actual cost in this contract renewal. We need the City to increase the rate per participant for COMPASS Elementary to \$4,900, and for SONYC Middle school to \$4,150 per participant. This requires the **City to increase**

**funding to the COMPASS system by just over \$154M in the FY26 budget to get after-school programs halfway to full funding. This is an investment in the critical infrastructure that New Yorkers rely upon and without it, the City is putting the non-profit sector at risk.**



**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:  
Committee on Education  
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Written Testimony submitted by  
Debra Sue Lorenzen, Director of Youth and Education  
March 13, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Joseph and members of the New York City Council Committee on Education for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing. My name is Debra Sue Lorenzen. I am the Director of Youth and Education for St. Nicks Alliance in North Brooklyn, including Community School Districts 13, 14, 16 and 23. St. Nicks Alliance serves more than 10,000 youth and their families through comprehensive youth and education services for ages 2-24 years old. Among our NYCDYCD-funded youth services are a constellation of COMPASS, COMPASS High, SONYC, SYEP, Beacons and Cornerstones.

I want to begin by thanking City Council and Chair Stevens for your deep and long-standing commitment to youth services. The most important investment today's grown ups can make in New York City's future is in our youngest residents. Yet, the Mayor's budget is wholly inadequate to meet those needs during and beyond the schoolday. St. Nicks Alliance implores City Council to demand a budget that cares for our city's children.

St. Nicks Alliance stands with our fellow settlement houses and United Neighborhood Houses in to support and stabilize citywide youth services and their workforce, including:

- Commit to fully funding afterschool programs by investing \$154 million this year;
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth;
- Maintain the \$16.5 million total in discretionary funding for the City Council's Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project;
- Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative;
- Submit Waiver of Hardship to the State to access Raise the Age funds;
- Reduce barriers preventing asylum seeking families from accessing youth-serving programs.

**Commit to Fully Funding Afterschool Programs**

St. Nicks Alliance, and its affiliate School Settlement Association, operates 11 COMPASS/SONYC programs which provide afterschool and summer programming to school-aged youth in Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bedford Stuyvesant and Brownsville. The base funding for these DYCD contracts predates my arrival, ten years ago, as the Director of Youth and Education at St. Nicks Alliance.

In January of 2025, we received communication from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) that our contracts would, once again, be extended for three years—bringing us to 13 years on the same contract with no increases, ignoring the real cost of running programming and paying living wages, which has destabilized the workforce. **This disinvestment is unacceptable and the City**

**must commit to funding higher base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to maintain the stability of NYC's afterschool system.**

In November 2023, UNH released a report that detailed the actual cost of running an afterschool program, including a sample budget - [Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City](#). Based on this assessment, the City should fund COMPASS Elementary programs at a rate of \$6600 per participant, and SONYC Middle School programs at a rate of \$5500 per participant. The City must commit to phasing in these rates by funding a halfway increase in the FY26 budget. The chart below shows a breakdown of the number of slots of each program model and funding rate, as well as the total funding needed to bring current contracts up to fully funded rates.

| Current Rate               | # of Slots | FY26 Phase 1 Increased Rate                | Additional Funding for Phase 1 Rate | FY27 Fully Funded Rates                            | Additional Funding Needed to Fully Fund |
|----------------------------|------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>COMPASS Elementary</i>  |            |  |                                     |  |   |
| \$2800                     | 31,456     | \$4900                                     | \$66,057,600                        | \$6600   | \$119,532,800                           |
| \$3200                     | 15,728     | \$4900                                     | \$26,737,600                        | \$6600   | \$53,475,200                            |
| <i>SONYC Middle School</i> |            |  |                                     |  |   |
| \$3200                     | 64,768     | \$4150                                     | \$61,529,600                        | \$5500   | \$148,966,400                           |
|                            |            | <b>Additional Funding Needed for FY26:</b> | <b>\$154,324,800</b>                | <b>Additional Funding Needed for Full Funding:</b> | <b>\$321,974,400</b>                    |

**The City should increase funding to the COMPASS system by \$154,324,800 in the FY26 budget to get programs halfway to full funding.** With a forthcoming RFP, the City must add an additional \$321,974,400 in funding to the COMPASS system to achieve per participant funding rates of \$6600 and \$5500 for COMPASS Elementary and SONYC programs, respectively.

Finally, we urge DYCD to work with providers to develop a plan for serving youth with disabilities in COMPASS/SONYC programs. Recommendations include:

- Providing funding for paraprofessional support and allow that paraprofessional staff to report directly to CBO staff;
- Enable CBOs to hire experts and trainers in multiple modalities of learning to support Education Specialists and other existing staff;
- Give program staff access to assistive technologies (and training on how to use them) like communicators (including speech-to-text devices), computer access tools, hearing and visual aids, and more present in their community centers; and
- Issue clear protocols for CBOs to seek out support when integrating a youth with a disability and have programs available to refer these youth to if the current arrangement is not fulfilling that young person's needs.

#### **Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth**

St. Nicks Alliance partners with 11 schools to realize Summer rising. Despite DYCD and DOE's desire to improve the program model over the past four years, the City has released little data on its efficacy. We

were proud to participate in a United Neighborhood Houses study of Summer Rising, resulting in Fall 2024's [\*One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families\*](#). The settlement houses were sharing similar experiences:

Many families are dependent on free summer programming—they will send their children because they have no choice, even if they don't like the model. Only 13% of middle schoolers felt engaged in the morning session of Summer Rising, mirroring the frequent complaints we have so often heard. As our frontline staff have experience widely, students with IEPs and English Language Learners are not receiving necessary accommodations.

Further, this year NYCPS released the *Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis*<sup>1</sup>. This data shows moderate academic gains in the elementary school participants. Summer Rising's Middle schooler though showed no statistically significant gains in math, and fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group.

With an early restoration of summer programming for FY26, **the City should use a portion of the dedicated summer funding to pilot alternative summer programming models for middle school students**. The model should look like summer camp—not the school day—because children learn outside the classroom through outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Allowing for multiple summer programming models<sup>2</sup> would also provide district-level flexibility to better serve English Language Learners and students with disabilities. In the current model, there is little room for flexibility and limited resources to provide these young people with the proper support.

**Maintain the \$16.5 million total in discretionary funding for the City Council's Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project.**

St. Nicks Alliance operates much-needed Adult Literacy programs that include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs. These programs enable our neighbors to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their families. Adult literacy programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

The wave of newcomers to New York City since 2022 has increased the need for adult literacy education. In FY25, DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new geographical restrictions, limiting the eligibility of organizations to apply for funding based on their location, and these changes left organizations such as St. Nicks Alliance without funding to sustain their adult literacy programs. In response, the City Council increased funding for adult literacy initiatives to \$16.5 million in FY25. This was an impactful increase that has been critical for sustaining programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations.

The City Council's \$16.5 million Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project currently fund 62 programs, including 15 programs run by UNH members. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic

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1

[https://pwsblobprd.schools.nyc/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summer-rising-2024-impact-analysis-web-deck.pdf?sfvrsn=62dd096a\\_2](https://pwsblobprd.schools.nyc/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summer-rising-2024-impact-analysis-web-deck.pdf?sfvrsn=62dd096a_2)

<sup>2</sup> Examples of alternative summer programming models are provided in our [Recommendations for Summer 2025](#) document.

priority for programming, **it is crucial that the City Council continue this \$16.5 million support to make sure that adult learners continue to have access to quality classes.**

### **Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative**

Five years after the pandemic first hit NYC, our youth continue to have significant unmet mental health needs. It is generally accepted that youth mental health services are more effective when provided in a safe and trusted setting, which makes CBO-led youth programs the perfect environment for these supports. St. Nicks Alliance has long attempted to address this crisis through our School Success Model, which aims to help remove barriers to academic development by providing mental health interventions (as well as reading interventions) during afterschool. Yet, without dedicated funding through DYCD, we have experienced first hand the difficulty in meeting demand.

**We propose using approximately \$3 million in new Council Initiative funds to create a new Youth Mental Health initiative.** This new initiative would provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs – such as Beacons, Cornerstones and COMPASS/SONYC with a focus on out-of-school time. Afterschool providers such as St. Nicks Alliance would be able to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs – much in the same way the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative functions for older adults. These funds could also offer supports for youth workers when dealing with mental health crises, or creating proactive programming for mental health wellness.

### **Submit Waiver of Hardship to the State to Access Raise the Age Funds**

Last fall marked five years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses. Evidence from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. However, it would be possible for New York City to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our City and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's reluctance to baseline funding for programs that were restored for only one year in the FY25 budget. The supportive services in danger of being cut if not restored in the FY25 budget include:

- \$12 million for restorative justice programs, and
- \$14 million for Community Schools, which provide young people and families with wrap-around supports.

**We therefore urge the Council to pressure the Adams Administration to submit a letter with the waiver of hardship to the New York State Office of Children and Families to allow New York City to be considered for the funding.**

### **Reduce Barriers Preventing Asylum Seeking Families from Accessing Youth-Serving Programs**

Newly arrived families face many hurdles in accessing child care and youth programs – challenges that New York's CBOs are unable to address without financial and administrative support from the City. Afterschool can be a supportive and stabilizing factor if: Our families have free transportation when



after school ends. We can provide more bilingual staff who can support youth in their own language. Ultimately, of course, our families need stabilize housing and school.

Especially with the current threats from federal actions, the City's inability to provide consistency for immigrant youth and provide supports to keep them enrolled in child care and after school programs is a missed opportunity to support our newest New Yorkers. **For the City to appropriately tackle this issue, it must simultaneously invest in after school, early childhood education, and youth mental health services, while removing barriers to access.**

Thank you for your consideration of St.Nicks Alliance's recommendations and for your continued commitment to NYC children and families.

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Dear Chair Stevens and Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the critical need for continued and enhanced funding for programs that support children and youth across our city.

My name is Joshell Lawrence, and I am the Youth Assistant Coordinator of Project DOT a youth focused sexual violence prevention and leadership program developed by the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (The Alliance). The Alliance's mission is to prevent sexual violence and reduce the harm it causes through education, prevention programming, and the pursuit of legal and policy change. Project DOT is a key pillar of this mission and is funded by the city council through the Young Women's Initiative. We are asking for an enhancement from \$100,000 to \$125,000 to expand our program's reach.

Project DOT is a sexual violence prevention and youth leadership program designed to address the unique challenges faced by young people from gender, racial, and ethnically marginalized communities in New York City. Launched in 2014 by The Alliance, Project DOT has served as a vital resource for young people who often face systemic barriers to accessing comprehensive sexual violence prevention education and leadership opportunities.

I'm here today advocating on behalf of the Alliance and Project DOT not only as a coordinator of the program, but as a young person who was once a beneficiary of Project DOT.

I joined Project DOT during my senior year of high school as a youth participant, under the Pride cohort. Project DOT didn't just change my worldview—it opened me up to a new understanding of myself and the systems that shaped my daily life. At the time, I was unaware of the different forms of consent. I didn't fully grasp what a healthy versus unhealthy relationship looked like. I had never heard terms like bias or systemic inequality. As these were subjects never discussed in depth at my high school. Project DOT didn't just provide education on sexual violence prevention—it gave me and so many others a voice in conversations we're often left out of. In my eyes, young people, particularly those from marginalized communities, are rarely ever given the opportunity to lead conversations on problems that affect us.

At Project DOT, through culturally responsive programming, we empower youth to take an active role in preventing violence in their communities while developing leadership skills that prepare them for their futures.

Currently, Project DOT is funded at \$100,000 through the Young Women's Initiative. We are seeking an enhancement to \$125,000 to expand our program's reach and impact. This increase in funding would allow us to:

- Serve more young people across all five boroughs by expanding partnerships with community-based organizations and schools.

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- Enhance our curriculum to address emerging needs, including digital safety, healthy relationships, and consent education.
- Provide stipends for youth participants, ensuring accessibility for those who might not otherwise be able to engage in leadership development opportunities.
- Strengthen our mentorship and peer leadership training, equipping young leaders with the tools they need to advocate for themselves and their communities.

The need for programs like Project DOT is urgent. Young people continue to face high rates of sexual violence and harassment. Nationally, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will experience sexual violence before the age of 18<sup>3</sup>. 49% of LGBTQ+ youth ages 13-18 report experiencing some form of sexual violence, with rates even higher among Black and Indigenous youth<sup>4</sup>.

Without adequate funding, prevention programs that center their voices and experiences remain under-resourced, leaving many without the tools they need to protect themselves and their peers. Investing in Project DOT is an investment in the safety, leadership, and future of New York City's youth.

We urge the City Council to prioritize youth-centered violence prevention initiatives by increasing Project DOT's funding to \$125,000. This investment will ensure that more young people—particularly those most at risk—receive the education and support they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to ensuring the well-being and safety of New York City's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Joshell Lawrence

Youth Assistant Coordinator, Project DOT

New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault

**The New York City Council  
Committee on Children and Youth  
Chair, Althea Stevens**



**City Hall**

March 20, 2025

**Building on our success: Four game changer investments for  
children and families**



**Testimony of**

Jeremy C. Kohomban, PhD

President and CEO, The Children's Village

President, Harlem Dowling

Good afternoon Chair Stevens and members of the Committee:

I am Jeremy Kohomban, President and CEO of The Children's Village and President of Harlem Dowling. Two organizations, founded in New York City in the early 1800s with a unified mission, to ensure that all children are with people who provide them unconditional love and belonging.

Despite the changes, we continue to make progress in New York City. We have lower numbers of children being separated from family, when compared to other jurisdictions, many more of our teens navigating foster care are succeeding and graduating high school and we have many more young people who have experienced our systems leading and guiding us in our effort to be even more effective than we were before.

There are four (4) areas where your support can will allow us to experience exponential breakthroughs:

1. Our amazing youth need housing. They deserve to live in integrated, beautiful and affordable homes located in desirable neighborhoods. We can and we must break-away from the historical, segregated housing strategy.
2. The reason why we have less children languishing in residential foster care is simple, our amazing foster parents stepped-up and created loving homes. Our foster parents deserve every support that we can give them. They are amazing.

3. We need more support for our cross-over youth. These are teens touched by both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. We are not doing enough for them.
4. Finally, thank you for supporting Fair Futures. It's a game changer and your continued support allows for the incredible outcomes experienced by youth.



**The New York City Council  
Committee On Children and Youth  
Chair: Council Member Althea V. Stevens**

**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary  
Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, The Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan for  
Fiscal Years 2026-2029, and The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's  
Management Report**

Testimony of  
The Legal Aid Society  
Community Justice Unit

March 20, 2025

Presented by:

Illiana Santiago  
Staff Attorney  
Community Justice Unit  
49 Thomas Street  
New York, NY 10013

On behalf of The Legal Aid Society's Community Justice Unit (CJU), I want to thank the Committee on Children and Youth and the Chair Council Member Althea Stevens for holding this critical hearing on the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) budget. My testimony today focuses on DYCD restoring our funding for CJU's legal service programs for cure violence participants and their families to prevent undermining the cure violence model's progress in reducing gun violence in our communities.

## **I. THROUGH ITS WORK SUPPORTING THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN REDUCING VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

The Cure Violence/Crisis Management System (CMS),<sup>1</sup> launched by the City Council in 2012, delivers a multiagency approach to reducing gun violence in New York City. Cure Violence is a community-based violence interruption model for reducing shootings that treats gun and gang violence as an infectious disease. It employs credible messengers from the community as violence interrupters and outreach workers to detect and stop conflicts before they escalate, to identify and help high-risk individuals, and to change the community's social norms concerning gun and gang violence. CMS encompasses the Cure Violence program and related programs that offer legal services, youth employment opportunities, school-based conflict resolution and mediation, mental health and wellness services, and other social support services.<sup>2</sup>

CJU was established in 2012 as part of the CMS model by the City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence.<sup>3</sup> CJU adopts the Cure Violence philosophy – that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement – and provides comprehensive legal services to CMS partners, participants, and community members to reduce gun and gang violence in their neighborhoods. We offer direct representation to thousands of New Yorkers experiencing legal emergencies. CJU's comprehensive legal services empower at-risk youth and their families to navigate criminal, housing, immigration, and any other legal issues that require assistance so they can improve their circumstances. *See* Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2024 Report.

In addition to legal counsel, CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and trainings at over 40 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve. *Id.* CJU staff and attorneys hold community events across all five boroughs, including Know Your Rights events, rallies, and educational clinics. *Id.* To help combat youth's early involvement in the criminal justice system, CJU's community organizers lead several Know Your Rights trainings and workshops. *Id.* For example, CJU leads a Youth Ambassador Training where youth learn how to organize their communities and teach other community members about their legal rights when interacting with police. CJU also leads cure violence workshops at schools and our CMS partner sites throughout the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighborhood Investments and Public Safety, New York City Council, *available at* <https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/#:~:text=Cure%20employs%20credible%20messengers%20from,with%20respect%20to%20gun%20violence>.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Finance Division, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, March 19, 2020, *available at* [098-MOCJ.pdf \(nyc.gov\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> The New York City Council, Task Force to Combat Gun Violence, Task Chairs City Council Member Jumaane Williams and Fernando Cabrera, *available at* <https://council.nyc.gov/press/2012/12/21/617/>.



Through these comprehensive legal services, CJU works to defend, educate, and organize community members. CJU's defense services include running a critical 24/7 hotline for legal emergencies, such as arrests and housing evictions, helping individuals obtain their rap sheets and seal their criminal records, and assisting New Yorkers with employment and family law issues. We educate community members on their rights to help them navigate legal systems and access vital services that respond to their legal and social service needs. We organize community members to harness community power and mobilize communities to advocate for resources and social justice. As a result of our work, community members receive legal services that they otherwise might not be able to access, and those services directly contribute to their improved circumstances and safer communities. *See Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2024 Report.*

Our services help stop the spread of gun violence and improve people's circumstances in numerous ways, so I want to highlight three specific examples that illustrate the essence of our services:

- Our CMS/CV partner on Staten Island contacted us to assist with expediting a FHEPs to move voucher approval for a family where the son was the victim of gun violence. The site had been working to obtain this FHEPs to move approval for a few months but was not successful. The family found a new apartment through the Housing Connect Lottery and just needed the voucher approval to move in. The family urgently needed to move away from the area where the gun violence occurred and the teen was due to have surgery to address his injuries from being shot, his family wanted to be moved before his operation to allow him a safe place to recover. Once CJU got involved, we were able to obtain the voucher approval very quickly.
- We completed an 8-week Youth Ambassadorship program with participants from Man Up Inc's. East New York, Brooklyn. Our community organizer and staff attorney led the initiative. The program trained participants about the NYPD Gang Database with the aim of mobilizing them to educate their peers about this oppressive policing tool. Every Friday the youth looked forward to being in the workshop and they even suggested creating a public service announcement (PSA). As a result, the participants had to work with the CMS staff to setup videographer services, rehearse their scripts, and then memorize their lines. This project showed how talented the youth are, how they worked as a team supporting each other in their different roles and even improvising in the moment. After the day of the filming, the participants were invited to a ceremony joined by their friends and family where they were awarded certificates for becoming Youth Organizing Ambassadors. To this day we remain in contact with the participants and family members who were a part of the initiative.
- One of CJU's community organizers referred a senior citizen who was in need of legal advice-she was struggling to pay her rent each month because her Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption wasn't being applied because she failed to renew it properly and couldn't get any assistance from DHCR. She had mold and other conditions that needed to be repaired in her apartment. We reviewed all the SCRIE paperwork and determined what the issue was and how to resolve it getting SCRIE payments started again. We advised her regarding how to sue the landlord for the mold and other conditions in her apartment and she obtained a \$4,000 rent abatement and her landlord immediately started making repairs.

## **II. THE ONGOING FUNDING CUT OF THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT UNDERMINES THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM'S EFFORTS TO ERADICATE GUN VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

CJU's budget cut is a disinvestment in underserved communities, particularly underserved youth because CJU's services target those vulnerable communities. This cut signifies a decrease in legal services which means more underserved communities – experiencing over-policing, unstable housing, limited employment opportunities, and an overall lack of adequate services – are unable to address their basic needs. We know that our communities thrive when they are equipped with resources and access to opportunities. When we reduce critical legal services, we are only further entrenching the long-standing barriers to justice that have disproportionately impacted them and preventing people from rebuilding their lives. CJU's funding translates into tangible services that help mitigate the root causes of violence and that fosters a sense of security and trust in CMS's broader public safety strategies.

The administration's ongoing cut to CJU's funding undermines the CMS work to reduce violence. For example, last year after we learned of the funding cut, we almost had to reduce our 24/7 emergency hotline service. Our CMS partners rely on that service when their participants and staff are confronted with legal emergencies such as arrest and illegal evictions. The CMS organizations know that our comprehensive legal services have helped grow the number of participants in cure violence interruption programs because of our commitment to improving the lives of participants and their families. When we reduce our legal clinics, our Know Your Rights workshops, and our community events, that represents a disruption of essential services, and it sends the message that our most vulnerable communities are not a priority.

CJU's services are vital to the cure violence work. Members of the Mayor's Action Plan (MAP) and the Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), which is responsible for overseeing the contracts of CMS providers, recently attended one of CJU's legal education workshops. Following the workshop, they all agreed that CJU's legal services make up an essential component of the CMS effort to increase public safety in our communities.

The CMS/CV model has proven remarkably effective at keeping our communities safe. Recent data from the NYC Council Data Team showed that *“precincts that received a Cure [program] experienced an 18.1% reduction in shootings in the first year of the program. Additionally, we find a 16-19% reduction in the years after that, demonstrating the longevity of this change.”*<sup>4</sup> A 19% reduction in shootings means that lives were saved. But this administration's ongoing cut to CJU's work is damaging the CMS/CV network by cutting off comprehensive legal services for New York City's vulnerable communities.

## **III. INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE UNIT PAYS DIVIDENDS BECAUSE IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS.**

Funding CJU is an investment in communities that are in crisis. And that investment pays dividends because CJU has proven to serve more communities in ways that directly contribute to

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<sup>4</sup> NYC Council Data Team, Cure Violence Programs in NYC, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/data/cure/>.

our city's public safety. In FY24, CJU provided 8163 legal services, including 537 services to Cure Violence partner organizations and 7626 to non-affiliated community members throughout New York City. *See Exhibit A, Community Justice Unit 2024 Report.* These numbers include 789 services to Project Hope and Project Reset. During FY24, CJU also organized 111 events, including legal clinics, office hours, and community townhalls. Additionally, we also launched an advocacy campaign titled “Your Rights, Your Power” meant to educate New Yorkers about their rights during police encounters. This campaign successfully reached over 1.6 million fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds throughout New York City.

As much as we want to replicate the successes of FY24, the 1.5 million funding cut has forced us to scale back some of our services resulting in community members being left in a state of crisis without their basic needs met. As CMS has shown, reducing violence and promoting public safety requires a multi-faceted approach that includes legal support, community education, and systemic transformation. We cannot afford to lose sight of the long-term benefits of these services, which have created safer, more connected neighborhoods and instilled a sense of care and trust between residents and the institutions designed to protect them.

### **Conclusion**

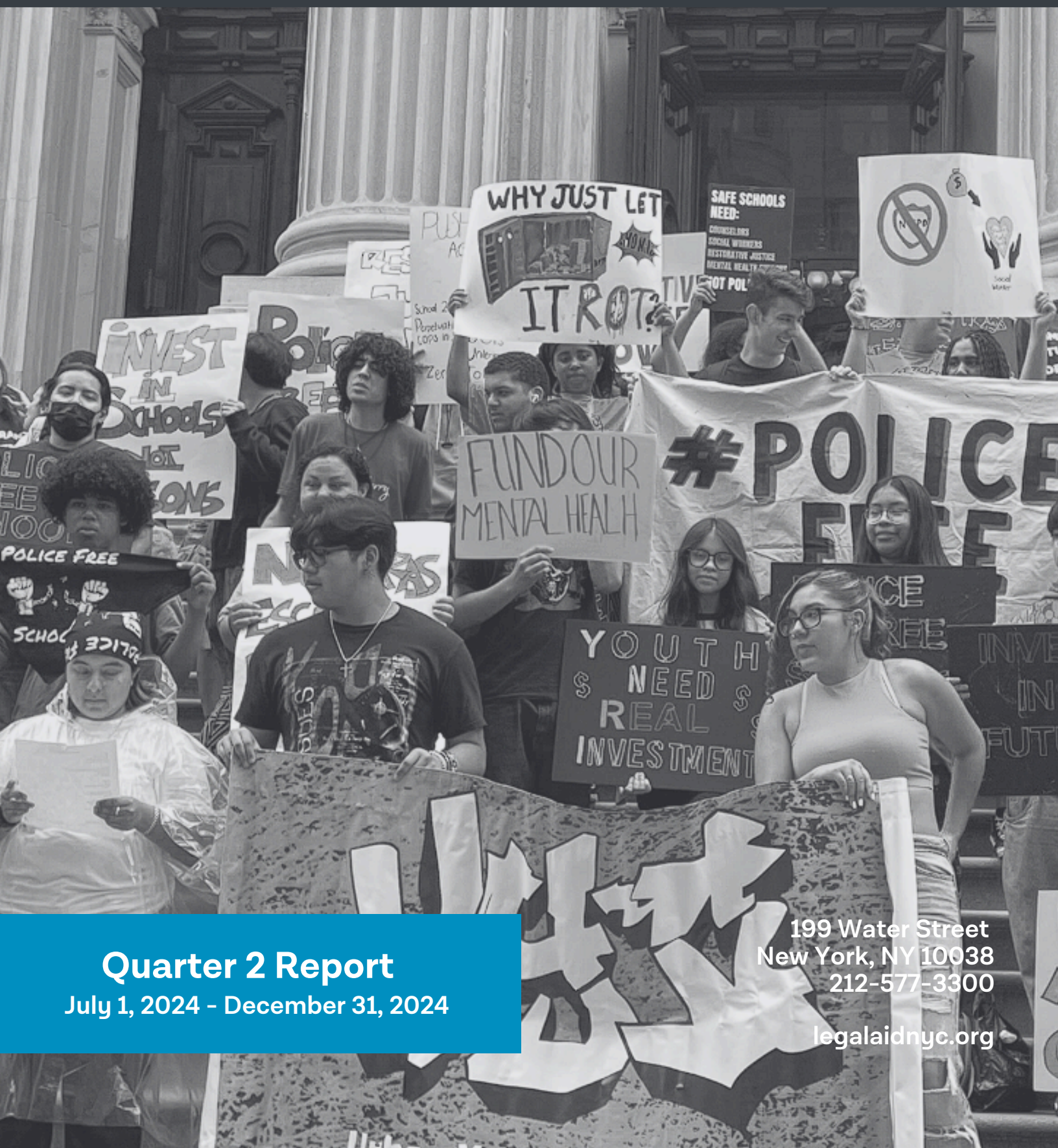
Our communities thrive when they can access comprehensive legal services that improve their lives. To invest in community safety, particularly among youth in underserved communities, the City should restore CJU’s funding so we can continue providing critical legal services to communities and meaningfully support the crisis management work to reduce gun violence.

# Exhibit A



# The Community Justice Unit

**THE  
LEGAL AID  
SOCIETY**  
**CRIMINAL  
DEFENSE**



## Quarter 2 Report

July 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024

199 Water Street  
New York, NY 10038  
212-577-3300

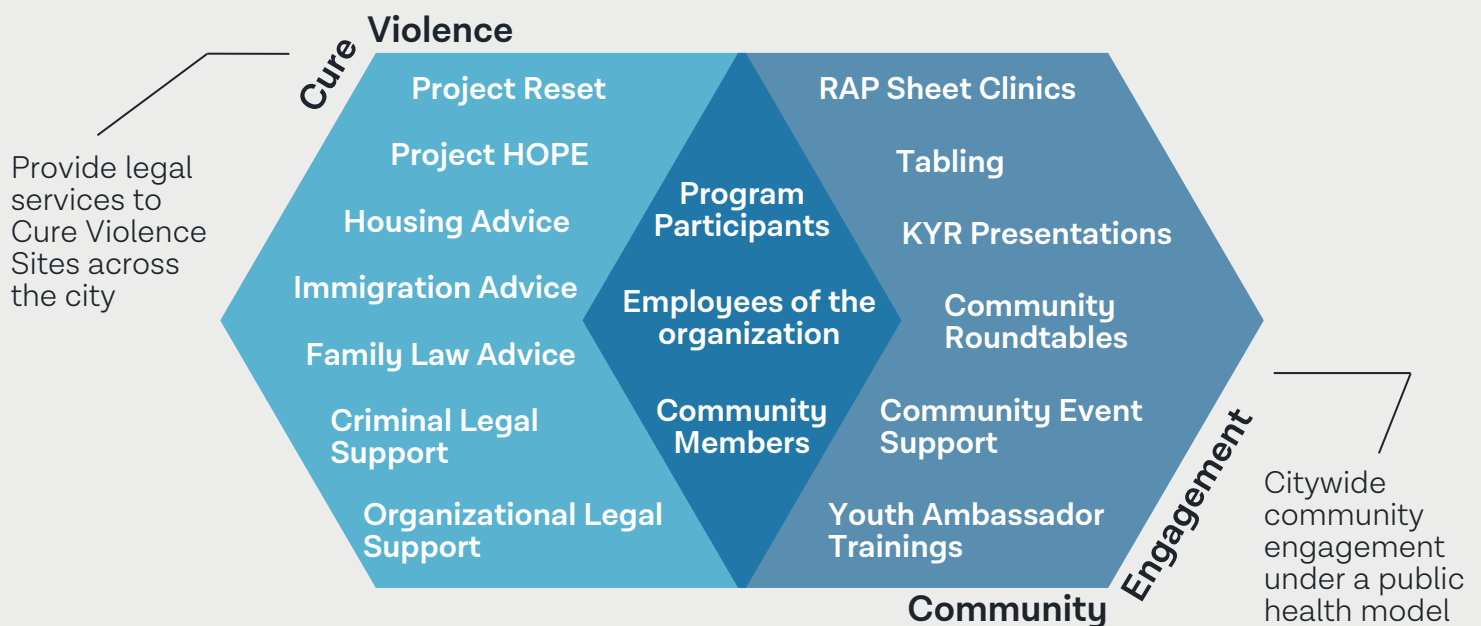
[legallaidnyc.org](http://legallaidnyc.org)



# Empowering NYC Communities

The Community Justice Unit  
The Legal Aid Society

The Community Justice Unit (CJU) was established in 2011 as part of the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence. The Unit adopts the Cure Violence philosophy - that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community engagement. Our work empowers underserved communities impacted by gun violence to develop proactive strategies to reduce violence through providing holistic legal representation, extensive community outreach, and public educational campaigns. Since 2014, CJU has become the primary legal service provider of New York City's Crisis Management System, a network of credible messengers who mediate conflicts and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence.



# Implementing the CV Model

|                   | INTERRUPTING TRANSMISSION  | REDUCING HIGHEST RISK   | CHANGING COMMUNITY NORMS  |
|-------------------|--|---|---|
| MODEL GOALS       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent Retaliations</li> <li>• Mediate Conflicts</li> <li>• Keep Conflicts Cool</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess Highest Risk</li> <li>• Change Behavior</li> <li>• Provide Treatment</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to Shootings</li> <li>• Organize Community</li> <li>• Spread Positive Norms</li> </ul>   |
| CJU ROLE          | <p>Provide support to CV partner agencies and participants intermediary role between communities and law enforcement</p>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vertical Representation Model</li> <li>• Connect CV partner agencies, community members, and participants to social/legal services</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amplify Community Voices</li> <li>• Challenge policies negatively impacting communities (e.g. MJ reform, gang database)</li> </ul>   |
| SERVICES PROVIDED | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Surrenders</li> <li>• 24/7 Hotlines</li> <li>• Emergency Legal Support</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rap Sheet Clinics</li> <li>• Job Fairs/Employment Training</li> <li>• Access to Benefits (Housing, Disability, Education, Healthcare)</li> <li>• Case Closed - Record Sealing</li> <li>• Immigration Issues</li> <li>• Court Information/Legal Advice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shooting Responses</li> <li>• Know Your Rights Events</li> <li>• Community Events (Tabling)</li> <li>• Policy Advocacy/Reform</li> <li>• Awareness Campaigns</li> <li>• Pathways to College</li> <li>• Gun Violence Awareness</li> </ul> |



# Our Services

CJU integrates the Cure Violence initiative into its legal and outreach services. The Unit provides legal support on various issues such as housing, criminal law, and crisis intervention. The CJU also operates a 24-hour hotline to address community members' most urgent legal needs.

To engage the community members outside of CMS sites, the CJU hosts events like Rap Sheet clinics, Voting Registration drives, and Know Your Rights trainings. The Unit also organizes annual public awareness campaigns. Each campaign targets historically over-policed neighborhoods and shifts the focus from punitive measures to expanded community services and support.

# Our Impact

**325**

individual legal services provided

**221**

of the individual legal services provided were to Project Rest and Project Hope participants

**48**

events hosted by the CJU

**3,911**

event attendees

**96**

hotline calls received

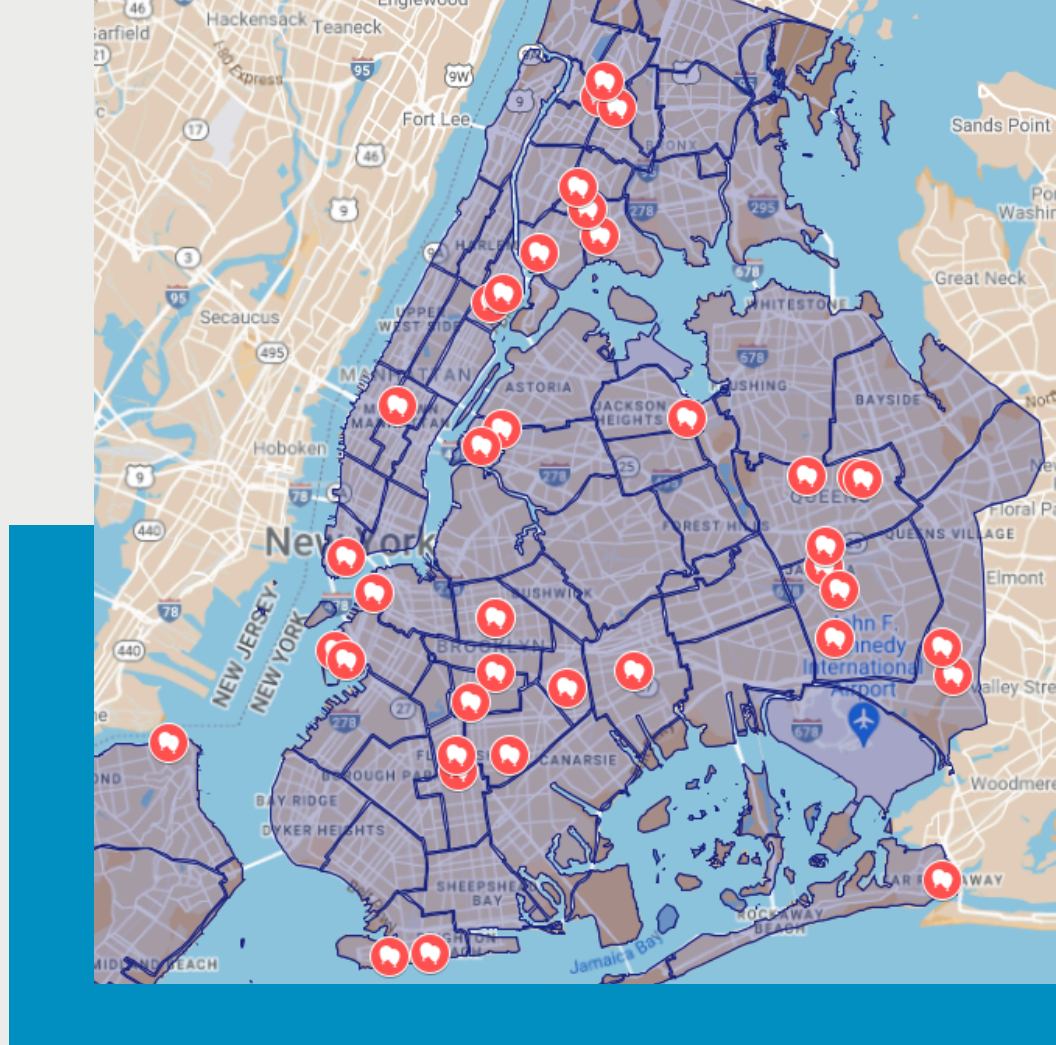




# Our Service Locations

The CJU provides services across all five boroughs, including over 30 Crisis Management System (CMS) locations and Cure Violence sites.

The map to the right provides an overview of New York City Council Districts with icons on the 25 neighborhoods served by the partner sites the CJU worked alongside during the first two quarters of FY 2025.



## Our Most Served Partners

SAVE OUR STREETS



Save Our Streets  
Bronx



COMMUNITY  
CAPACITY  
DEVELOPMENT

Community Capacity  
Development



Man UP! Inc.



Red Hook Initiative

Bronx  
Community  
Solutions

Bronx Community  
Solutions



THE  
LEGAL AID  
SOCIETY  
CRIMINAL  
DEFENSE

# Our Advocacy

In July, the CJU joined forces with organizations across New York City to raise awareness about gun violence, promote community health, and support youth advocacy. During National Gun Violence Awareness Month, CJU participated in the Gun Violence Awareness Community Call for Peace event, following tragic shootings in Brooklyn that remind us of the urgency of Cure Violence efforts. CJU attorneys engaged community members at the SPF Cure Violence Health & Awareness event, while CJU organizers supported Queensbridge's "Occupy the Corner" Safe Summer event by providing brochures and legal assistance to attendees.

Housing attorneys offered legal advice to residents at Queensbridge Houses, and CJU continued leading Know Your Rights workshops. CJU also stood alongside youth advocates at the Invest in Youth rally, and celebrated women's leadership at the second Women in Leadership Conference.



In September, the CJU partnered with Bronx Rise Against Gun Violence (B.R.A.G.) and Stand Up To Violence. CJU stood in solidarity at multiple events, including "Occupy the Corner" in Harlem and "Save Our Streets" in the Bronx, raising awareness and distributing

resources like swag bags to strengthen neighborhood safety. Through their newly launched "Do NYC Justice" campaign, CJU informed underserved communities of free legal resources. In addition, CJU facilitated Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests to help individuals challenge unjust gang database listings and organized voter registration drives at Rikers Island.







In September, The Legal Aid Society hosted its inaugural East Harlem Law Day. The event was co-sponsored by New York City Council Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala, East Harlem Community Board 11, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, New York State Assembly Member Edward Gibbs, and New York State Senator José M. Serrano.

The event invited New Yorkers to learn about their rights and get information about various areas of law, including housing/NYCHA, immigration, education, public benefits, community development, and more. CJU staff tabled at the event and provided information on the services they offer.

In October, the CJU supported Save Our Streets to end gun violence at the neighborhood level. Our staff participated in their shooting response and call to action in the Bronx. These events convey that the community will not tolerate violence and provide services to meaningful educational and employment opportunities.





| CV Provider/Pct             | Services Rendered | # of Individuals | # of Workshops | Subject Area                            | # of attendees | Date             |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|---|----------------|------------------|
| 100 Suits                   | Advice            | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 9/5/2024         |
| 100 suits                   | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshop                            | 24             | 8/2/2024         |
| 696 BuildQueensbridge       | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 7/9/2024         |
| 696 BuildQueensbridge       | Internal Referral | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 7/9/2024         |
| BIVO/Camba                  | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 7/12/2024        |
| BIVO/Camba                  | Brief Services    | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 7/5/2024         |
| BIVO/Camba                  | External Referral | 1                |                | Employment Law                          |                | 7/9/2024         |
| BIVO/Camba                  | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 84             | 7/11, 7/27       |
| Both Sides of the Violence  | Brief Services    | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 7/8/2024         |
| Both Sides of the Violence  | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshop                            | 21             | 7/16/2024        |
| BRAG                        | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 236            | 7/20, 8/17       |
| Bronx Community Solutions   | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 135            | 8/28/2024        |
| BTTM                        | Internal Referral | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 8/22/2024        |
| CCD                         | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 90             | 7/20/2024        |
| CCD                         | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshop                            | 7              | 8/14/2024        |
| CCD - QB                    | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 129            | 7/23/2024        |
| CJU Event                   | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 160            | 9/25/2024        |
| CJU Event                   | Advice            |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 15             | 9/28/2024        |
| DRUM                        | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 7/21/2024        |
| ELMCOR                      | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 9/26/2024        |
| ELMCOR                      | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 115            | 7/27/2024        |
| LifeCamp                    | Advice            | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 9/6/2024         |
| LifeCamp                    | Hotline           | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 8/22/2024        |
| ManUp                       | Advice            | 2                |                | Criminal, Housing Law                   |                | 9/2, 9/11        |
| ManUp                       | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 426            | 7/24, 8/31       |
| ManUp                       | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | KYR/Workshop                            | 22             | 7/3, 7,26        |
| Mobile Justice Unit         | Brief Services    |                  | 3              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 75             | 7/16, 7/18       |
| Operation HOOD              | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 9/27/2024        |
| Other                       | Advice            | 7                |                | Family, Housing Law                     |                | 7/1/24 - 9/30/24 |
| Other                       | Brief Services    | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 7/9/2024         |
| Pomonok                     | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 100            | 8/3/2024         |
| Project Echo                | Advice            | 1                |                | Immigration                             |                | 9/16/2024        |
| Project Echo                | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | KYR/Workshop                            | 68             | 7/8, 7/15        |
| Project Hope                | Representation    | 32               |                | Project Hope                            |                | 7/1/24 - 9/30/24 |
| Project Reset               | Brief Services    | 57               |                | Project Reset                           |                | 7/1/24 - 9/30/24 |
| Project Reset               | Representation    | 71               |                | Project Reset                           |                | 7/1/24 - 9/30/24 |
| Red Hook Initiative         | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 241            | 8/23/2024        |
| RTG/SOS                     | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 14             | 8/15/2024        |
| SAVE/GOSO                   | Advice            | 2                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 9/9, 9/13        |
| SAVE/GOSO                   | Hotline           | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 7/11/2024        |
| SAVE/GOSO                   | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 217            | 8/15, 8/29       |
| SOS South Bronx             | Advice            | 1                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 9/30/2024        |
| SOS South Bronx             | Hotline           | 2                |                | Criminal Law                            |                | 8/22/2024        |
| SOS South Bronx             | Brief Services    |                  | 2              | Community Fair/Panels/Engagement events | 203            | 8/30, 9/21       |
| SOS South Bronx             | Brief Services    |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshop                            | 32             | 9/19/2024        |
| Street Corner Resources     | Advice            | 1                |                | Misc                                    |                | 8/7/2024         |
| Street Corner Resources     | Brief Services    | 1                |                | Prisoner's Rights                       |                | 8/7/2024         |
| Urban Neighborhood Services | Advice            | 1                |                | Housing Law                             |                | 7/15/2024        |
| Urban Neighborhood Services | Internal Referral | 1                |                | Misc                                    |                | 7/9/2024         |

**Community Justice Unit**  
**Reporting Period: 10/1/2024 - 12/31/2024**

| CV Provider/Pct            | Services Rendered | # of individuals | # of Workshops | Subject Area                             | # of attendees | Date          |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|--|----------------|---------------|
| 100 Suits                  | Advice            | 2                |                | housing law                              |                | 10/1,10/2     |
| 100 Suits                  | Representation    | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 11/7/2024     |
| BCU                        | Brief sevice      |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 75             | 10/15/2024    |
| BIVO/Camba                 | Advice            | 1                |                | benefits                                 |                | 12/16/2024    |
| BIVO/Camba                 | Representation    | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 11/14/2024    |
| BRAG                       | Advice            | 1                |                | civil rights                             |                | 10/25/2024    |
| BRAG                       | External Referral | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 10/9/2024     |
| Bronx Community Solutions  | Brief sevice      |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 45             | 12/19/2024    |
| Bronx Community Solutions  | Representation    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 195            | 12/15/2024    |
| Brooklyn Elder Law Project | Brief sevice      | 1                |                | housing law                              |                | 10/11/2024    |
| BTTM                       | Advice            | 1                |                | health law                               |                | 12/15/2024    |
| CCI                        | Brief sevice      | 4                |                | misc                                     |                | 11/13 - 12/31 |
| City Council               | Representation    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 240            | 12/15/2024    |
| Clear                      | Brief sevice      | 1                |                | misc                                     |                | 11/12/2024    |
| Clear                      | External Referral | 10               |                | misc                                     |                | 11.2024       |
| DYCD                       | Brief sevice      |                  | 2              | KYR/Workshops                            | 51             | 11/14, 11/21  |
| East Harlem Tutorial       | Advice            | 1                |                | housing law                              |                | 12/1/2024     |
| Elite Learners             | Brief sevice      |                  | 2              | KYR/Workshops                            | 17             | 11/15, 12/4   |
| Elmcore                    | Brief sevice      |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 150            | 12/6/2024     |
| Elmcore                    | Advice            | 3                |                | benefits,misc, housing law               |                | 12/9, 2/10    |
| GDLU                       | Brief sevice      | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 11/26/2024    |
| GDLU                       | Brief sevice      |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshops                            | 6              | 11/27/2024    |
| Immigrant Defense Project  | Representation    |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshops                            | 250            | 12/17/2024    |
| Man Up!                    | Advice            | 2                |                | criminal, housing law                    |                | 12/15, 12/29  |
| Man Up!                    | Internal Referral | 1                |                | housing law                              |                | 12/4/2024     |
| Marcy Community Center     | Brief sevice      |                  | 1              | KYR/Workshops                            | 27             | 12/5/2024     |
| NYC CCRB                   | Representation    |                  | 1              | Community Fair/Panels/Engage ment events | 45             | 11/21/2024    |
| Operation HOOD             | Representation    | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 11/15/2024    |
| Other                      | Representation    | 1                |                | family law                               |                | 10/18/2024    |
| Project Echo               | Advice            | 1                |                | criminal                                 |                | 12/21/2024    |
| Project Hope               | Representation    | 17               |                | misc                                     |                | 10/1 - 12/31  |
| Project Reset              | Brief sevice      | 3                |                | misc                                     |                | 10/1 - 12/31  |
| Project Reset              | External Referral | 1                |                | misc                                     |                | 10/1 - 12/31  |
| Project Reset              | Representation    | 40               |                | misc                                     |                | 10/1 - 12/31  |
| Rock Safe Streets          | Brief sevice      | 9                |                | housing, health, family, benefits, misc  |                | 10/1 - 12/31  |
| RTG/Bronxconnect           | Advice            | 3                |                | housing law                              |                | 10/1- 12/31   |

|                                 |                |   |   |  |     |                       |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---|---|--|-----|-----------------------|
| RTG/Bronxconnect                | Brief sevice   | 1 |   | criminal                                       |     | 10/10/2024            |
| RTG/Bronxconnect                | Brief sevice   |   | 1 | KYR/Workshops                                  | 23  | 11/18/2024            |
| SAVE/GOSO                       | Brief sevice   | 1 |   | civil rights                                   |     | 10/30/2024            |
| SOS Bedstuy                     | Representation | 1 |   | criminal                                       |     | 11/15/2024            |
| SOS Crown Heights               | Advice         | 1 |   | criminal                                       |     | 12/1/2024             |
| SOS Morrisania                  | Advice         | 1 |   | civil rights                                   |     | 11/11/2024            |
| SOS Morrisania                  | Brief sevice   | 1 |   | criminal                                       |     | 10/2/2024             |
| SOS South Bronx                 | Advice         | 4 |   | criminal,<br>employment                        |     | 10/1 - 12/31          |
| SOS South Bronx                 | Brief sevice   | 5 |   | criminal, family,<br>housing                   |     | 10/1 - 12/31          |
| SOS South Bronx                 | Representation | 1 |   | criminal                                       |     | 11/7/2024             |
| SOS South Bronx                 | Brief sevice   |   | 1 | Community<br>Fair/Panels/Engage<br>ment events | 43  | 11/22/2024            |
| SCR                             | Brief sevice   | 2 |   | civil rights                                   |     | 12/31/2024            |
| SCR, CCD, 100 suits             | Brief sevice   |   | 1 | Community<br>Fair/Panels/Engage<br>ment events | 312 | 12/30/2024            |
| Staten Island Justice<br>Center | Brief sevice   |   | 2 | KYR/Workshops                                  | 18  | 11/13, 12/13          |
| Take Root                       | Advice         | 1 |   | immigration                                    |     | 11/21/2024            |
| True2Life                       | Brief sevice   | 1 |   | family law                                     |     | 12/30/2024            |
| Urban Neighborhood<br>Services  | Advice         | 3 |   | family, housing                                |     | 11/11, 12/7,<br>12/18 |
|                                 |                |   |   |  |     |                       |

**Testimony from the Lower Eastside Girls Club  
City Council FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Committee on Children and Youth  
March 20, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Althea Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth. My name is Michelle Grier and I am the Chief Program Officer of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. LESGC connects young women and gender-expansive youth throughout New York City to healthy and successful futures filled with Joy, Power, and Possibility. We nurture supportive spaces where young people can dream big, find their passions, and connect to peers and careers through free, year-round programming and mentoring. Traditional social services often address only the symptoms of poverty—food insecurity and housing instability—without tackling the systemic inequities that perpetuate hardship. LESGC takes a holistic, community-driven approach that fosters long-term resilience, leadership, and economic mobility.<sup>1</sup>

Among the population living within the census tracts surrounding the LESGC facility<sup>2</sup> in the Lower East Side (CD3)<sup>3</sup> the median household income is \$37,785.<sup>4</sup> 60% of households report an income below \$50,000<sup>5</sup> and 55% of youth are living below the poverty line.<sup>6</sup> While many LESGC members are from the Lower East Side, we serve young people from across the five boroughs through our city-wide initiatives, reaching youth from 27 zip codes. In 2022, we launched our Center for Wellbeing & Happiness (CWBH), expanding our mission and service population with a core belief that the well-being of our young people is intimately connected to the well-being of their family and community. Also recognizing that once you are 18 years old you still need supports to navigate moving into adulthood. Thousands of individuals benefit annually from LESGC's programming, services, and initiatives.

NYC youth have been particularly impacted by the socio-economic tumult of recent years. According to the Citizens Committee of Children of NYC: *Keeping Track on New York Children 2024 Report*, growing income inequality keeps hundreds of thousands of NYC children living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In NYC, more than 80% of families with a child under 12 cannot afford child care or after-school care costs. More than 100,000 public school students are living in temporary housing. Black and Latiné

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<sup>1</sup> LESGC Youth Programming covers three key areas: **Education Equity and STEAM Access**: LESGC provides Educational Equity, Opportunity, and STEAM Access through its Sound, Audio, and Digital Media studios, Environmental Studies Lab, Rooftop Farm, Planetarium, Alphabet City Arts School and Design Studio. **Economic Mobility and Opportunity**: LESGC fosters economic mobility, career exploration, and leadership development, connecting hundreds of young women of color in NYC annually with paid internships, mentors, training, and 21st-century skills. **Civic Leadership**: LESGC leadership initiatives foster the next generation of leadership. Creating a diverse pipeline of young New Yorker advocates, activists, and policymakers.

<sup>2</sup> Census Tracts: 22.01, 22.02, 10.02, 20, 24, 26.01, 26.02, 28

<sup>3</sup> [2020 Census NYC Population Fact Finder. Census Tracts: 22.01, 22.02, 10.02, 20, 24, 26.01, 26.02, 28](#)

<sup>4</sup> [2018-2022-American Community Survey \(ACS\). \(2022\). NYC Population Fact Finder. Census Tracts: 22.01, 22.02, 10.02, 20, 24, 26.01, 26.02, 28](#)

<sup>5</sup>ibid

<sup>6</sup>ibid

youth are disconnected from school and employment at more than double the rate of their white peers. And 38% of NYC High School youth report having symptoms of depression.

Community-based youth programs, such as LESGC, are essential to addressing the youth mental health and affordability crises in NYC. Operating outside of schools and within neighborhoods, these organizations are valuable assets for youth, families, and communities alike (Gootman & Eccles, 2002; Vandell et al., 2015). A recent study by the Wallace Foundation highlights how culture-centered, community-based youth programs provide vital spaces to support the well-being and well-becoming of young people (Osai et al., 2025).

In 2023, over 190,000 (18%) children and youth in public schools were reached through the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) after-school programs. Despite this need, DYCD cut key programs in 2024, negatively impacting youth services throughout the city. Specifically, LESGC lost two DYCD grants: Compass Explorer (\$65,765) and Adolescent Literacy (\$108,274). While not fully covering program costs, these contracts are essential to our overall funding model. Beyond the government funding cuts, LESGC is also confronting the recent attack on DEI initiatives and general post-election fiscal uncertainty which have negatively impacted philanthropic giving among corporate, private foundations and individual donors.

LESGC is requesting \$2.5 million from the City Council in FY 26 to support the stabilization of the organization. Currently, LESGC is navigating a challenging financial reality and stands at a critical inflection point. Between a \$3 million mortgage for purchasing our CWBH space, rising costs due to inflation, and declining giving, our revenue has fallen behind, resulting in a \$2 million deficit. These fiscal challenges pose a direct and imminent risk to our ability to provide the vital services and innovative programming so many rely on at a time when the need is greater than ever. City Council support will:

- **Invest in a Proven Solution:** Support an organization with a demonstrated track record of success in uplifting youth.
- **Address Urgent Needs:** Provide critical resources to tackle the youth mental health crisis through culturally relevant, community-based approaches.
- **Create Lasting Change:** Promote long-term economic mobility by investing in education, workforce training, and comprehensive youth services.

As we search for a way forward, general operating support from the City Council would help us secure our legacy as a transformative force in youth development in the New York City and expand our impact for future generations.





**03.20.25 - Trinity Church Wall Street Testimony - Committee on Children and Youth - FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

To Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth:

My name is Natasha Lifton, Managing Director of External Affairs and Special Projects at Trinity Church in New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this Fiscal Year 2026 preliminary budget hearing. We were pleased to see that the Executive Budget includes funds for some critical youth programs such as Summer Rising. However, more must be done to ensure all New York City youth have access to comprehensive, high-quality services throughout the year.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,800 parishioners, who come from all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out our mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Trinity seeks to create a safe and validating community for as many young people as possible and youth well-being is core priority for the Church. Our afterschool programming, youth choir, youth group, music education, emergency food program, internships, and other efforts served approximately 12,000 young people in 2023. We also provided a total of \$18 million in grants and charitable gifts to New York City nonprofits for tutoring and mentorship, social emotional learning, school-based restorative practices, youth leadership, organizing, and civic engagement, mental health, and housing stability. And we partner directly with our neighborhood schools to provide support and resources such as food, school supplies, and clothing, including to those serving children from asylum seeker and homeless families.

In this context, we urge the City to invest in our young people and fully fund afterschool programs, particularly those that operate year-round and are high quality. Well-resourced afterschool programs are an important part of the continuum of services, ensuring that students get the academic support they need and have access to social and recreational programming, and parents can fully meet their work and/or education requirements. Research demonstrates that youth who participate in these programs are absent from school less often, fail fewer classes, and have higher high school graduation rates than their non-participating peers. Significant gains in test scores have also been linked to attending quality afterschool programs, as have fewer behavior problems.

As such, we urge the Mayor and the Council to:

- Fully fund the COMPASS and SONYC programs by investing an additional \$154 million, informed by an analysis conducted by United Neighborhood Houses regarding the true cost of operating high-quality afterschool programs.
- Restore \$5.5 million for the Summer Youth Employment Program.



- Enact and financially support the youth-focused recommendations made by the [Commission on Community Reinvestment](#) and the Closure of Rikers Island, established by Local Law 193, which propose investments that prevent or remove young people from criminal justice system involvement and ensure that they achieve healthy, productive, and positive outcomes.

Lastly, we ask the Council to pass a resolution calling on our leaders in Albany to make the [Solutions Not Suspensions Act](#) law. This legislation would end the overreliance on suspension as the default disciplinary method, which disproportionately impacts students of color, and instead use proven restorative justice practices and social-emotional supports.



## TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

New York City Council Committee on Children and Youth  
Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair

Submitted by:  
Faith Behum, UJA-Federation of New York

March 20, 2025

Thank you, Chairperson Stevens and members of the Committee on Children and Youth Services, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Faith Behum, and I am a Manager of Government and External Relations at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates over \$185 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

### **Maintain the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Nonprofit Human Services Providers**

UJA appreciates the City Council and Administration's \$741 million commitment to provide a 3% COLA for human services workers through FY27.

A COLA is a significant step towards addressing the historic underfunding and lack of investment in the human services sector, as these workers do some of the most important jobs in our communities yet are underpaid and undervalued. As government is the predominant funder of human services through government contracts, this has resulted in nearly 25% of all human services workers qualifying for food stamps in 2016-2018. Low wages also have a sweeping effect on workplace conditions and the outcome of programs, with high staff turnover and vacancy rates resulting in heavy and unsustainable workloads.

Years of underfunding of the sector have resulted in the human services workforce being some of the lowest compensated workers in New York City's economy. These are workers who do some of the most important jobs in our communities; they take care of our aging neighbors, assist families in staying in their homes, provide workforce training, work with people to overcome substance abuse and addiction, and help people from all walks of life in the event of an emergency. The COLA investment is a step in the right direction to ensuring city-contracted human services workers are paid fairly. **UJA urges the City Council and Administration to continue their commitment to supporting this workforce.**



### **Reverse the \$6.9 million cut made to COMPASS in FY 25**

The FY25 enacted budget included a \$6.9 million cut to the COMPASS after school program. **UJA is urging the City Council and Adams' Administration to include \$6.9 million in the FY 26 enacted budget for COMPASS reversing the cut made to the program in FY 25.**

The \$6.9 million cut made to COMPASS after school programs decreased access to these programs. Two nonprofits in UJA's network lost funding for 72 youth to attend their after school programs. One of these programs had a waitlist; both provided services to communities that had limited access to other affordable after school options. This cut came at a time when communities needed these services the most. According to the Citizens' Committee for Children, 80% of New York City families cannot afford child care or after school programs.<sup>1</sup> The inability to secure child care resulted in a loss of \$23 billion in economic activity in New York City in 2022. It is clear, families need more support not less to remain in New York City and thrive. **UJA urges the City Council and Adams' Administration to reverse the \$6.9 million cut made to COMPASS and to focus on investing in programs that are serving children and youth and strengthening communities across New York City.**

### **Increasing rates for after school programs**

Nonprofits in UJA's network oversee COMPASS and/or SONYC after school programs throughout New York City. COMPASS and SONYC programs have not been re-procured in over a decade, leaving providers with outdated reimbursement rates that do not reflect inflation. Providers were expecting DYCD to reissue an RFP in 2024 that was going to address these under payment issues. However, COMPASS and SONYC contracts were extended through Summer 2028 by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in January 2025. Providers were asked to continue to oversee programs with no additional funding included for enhanced rates.

The contract extension DYCD asked COMPASS and SONYC providers to agree to, would continue to compensate COMPASS after school providers between \$2,800 and \$3,200 per participant and SONYC after school providers at \$3,200 per participant. All programs are nine months long. Keeping the per participant rates at these levels does not help providers address the higher costs of overseeing these programs as well as increase salaries for staff that would help both attract and maintain employees in after school programs. Because of this, **the City must commit to funding higher per participant rates for after school programs in the FY 26 budget to maintain the stability of New York City's after school system.**

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) produced a report in November 2023, where they analyzed the true costs of implementing high-quality after school programs in New York City.<sup>2</sup> They took into account increasing salaries for staff in after school programs to at least \$22 an hour and applying a 3 percent COLA and additional costs related to other than personal services (OTPS). UNH found the true per participant rate for COMPASS elementary programs to be \$6,600, more than double what COMPASS programs are currently paid and what was included in the proposed contract extension. Using the same salary information, COLA and costs related to OTPS, UNH found the per participant rate for SONYC after school programs was \$5,500, double the current contract and proposed contract extension for a School-Year SONYC Program.

The cost of living continues to increase in New York City while the costs associated with providing services to children, youth and their families are also on the rise. After school programs cannot maintain staff and operate high quality services while being paid outdated rates that do not recognize these increased costs. **In order to address the true cost of providing high quality after school programming, the Adams' Administration**

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<sup>1</sup> [From Birth to Age 12: The \(Un\)Affordability of Child Care and Out-of-School Care in New York City | CCC New York](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://uploads.prod01.oregon.platform-os.com/instances/542/assets/True%20Cost%20of%20Afterschool%20November%202023.pdf?updated=1700510432>

**must invest \$154,324,800 in the FY 26 enacted budget.** This would phase-in higher rates and result in per participant rates for COMPASS Elementary of \$4900, and for SONYC middle school programs \$4150 per participant in the FY26 contract extensions. The goal must be to fully fund elementary and middle school programs in a new procurement in FY27 by adding \$321,974,400 to the COMPASS and SONYC after school system which would result in rates of \$6,600 and \$5,500 per participant respectively.

Other mechanisms that would ensure that DYCD is supporting providers to oversee high-quality after school programs include:

- Establishing year-round, twelve-month youth service contracts and streamlining the procurement process.
- Ensure that after school program enrollment is controlled locally by community-based organizations and not centralized by DYCD.
- Ensure that after school programs are paid on time and efforts to catch up on payments owed from previous fiscal years are immediately prioritized.
- When the new RFP for SONYC and COMPASS is released contracts must include:
  - Paying approved providers indirect rates in full, in accordance with the City's Indirect Cost Rate Initiative. Providers must also be able to claim those rates at the outset and include them in budgets, not have a placeholder rate that later gets amended.
  - Including annual funding for cost escalators in contracts, in accordance with inflation.
  - Supporting staffing ratios appropriate for School Age Child Care (SACC) licensing for all 12 months of the year.

COMPASS and SONYC programs continue to provide services to children and youth, regardless of how much or when they are reimbursed to do so. Increased financial investments must be made to better support these programs, so providers can continue to serve their communities for years to come.

### **Summer Rising**

This past summer, six nonprofits in UJA's network oversaw Summer Rising programs. Each of these agencies managed New York City funded summer camps that existed before the development of Summer Rising. Years of overseeing summer as well as after school programming for children and youth across New York City has resulted in each nonprofit gaining an understanding of the needs of the communities they serve. And more importantly what it takes to run successful programming for children and youth.

Every provider in the UJA network recognizes that the families they serve need access to free and consistent summer programs for their children. Private summer camps are often too expensive or do not offer enough hours or weeks of programming to support working parents' schedules. Summer Rising provides free programming for ten hours, up to seven weeks (depending on the age of the participant) for those who were able to secure spots in the program. Many of the families who received Summer Rising spots would have difficulty securing other summer programming for their children making it challenging for them to work and provide for their families through the summer. Free summer programming like Summer Rising is essential to supporting New York City families. **It is for this reason that UJA is thankful the FY 26 Preliminary Budget included \$19.6 million to continue to serve middle school students, five days a week until 6pm through summer 2025.** It is critical for planning purposes that Summer Rising providers know as early as possible the exact schedule they will be responsible for serving children and youth. UJA urges the Administration to baseline \$19.6 million in FY 27 onward so providers have a reliable and consistent Summer Rising schedule.

The need for free summer programming is evident, however it is unclear if Summer Rising should be the only free option for New York City families. Many families who received a Summer Rising spot for their child or children were simply happy to have access to free programming regardless of its structure. If parents are

disappointed in any aspects of Summer Rising, they often bring them to the attention of the Community Based Organization (CBO) overseeing the enrichment portion of the day. Specifically, many parents told CBOs they prefer having their children attend a typical summer camp style program that removes their children from classrooms and focuses on developing different skills through engaging in new activities. This year, parents were allowed to opt their child out of the academic portion of the day. However, few chose to do this because they did not have another programming option outside of Summer Rising to attend. Over 140,000 children applied for 110,000 Summer Rising slots in 2024. But the popularity of the program may be contributed to it being the only free summer programming option for families.

Families need access to free summer programs and community-based organizations want to continue offering this service. While Summer Rising may make sense for some families, UJA-Federation of New York believes New York City families need access to different summer program options for their children. This means while Summer Rising is invested in, a traditional full day summer camp model must also be supported. Below are recommendations that will strengthen future free summer programs (including programs that resemble Summer Rising) in New York City.

1. Ensure CBOs have autonomy over the enrollment process for summer programs. This includes access to the waitlist for their programs, being able to both view and actively move individuals on and off the waitlist. Allow families to directly enroll with the CBO they wish their child to attend programming at.
2. Establish a baseline funding level for the DOE and DYCD portions of the Summer Rising program and baseline funding for DYCD for traditional summer programming that does not have an academic component enabling more effective planning for the summer. Transition all summer programming contracts to twelve-month contracts which will promote year-round planning for the summer.
3. Ensure summer program providers are compensated promptly. As of October 2024, many CBOs have yet to receive payment for overseeing summer 2024 Summer Rising programs with some still waiting to be compensated for summer 2023 programming.
4. Develop an information-sharing system to ensure CBOs have access to information regarding students' Individualized Development Plans (IDPs) and allergies.
5. Ensure paraprofessionals are available for all participants who need them, and a specific protocol is developed to follow when a paraprofessional is unavailable to assist a participant who requires this support.
6. Require DYCD and DOE to have greater data transparency regarding the outcomes of surveys completed by families who participated in any city funded summer programs.

UJA looks forward to working with the City Council, Adams' Administration including DYCD and New York City Public Schools, to continue to improve and diversify summer programs for New York City families.

### **Child Care Assistance Program**

In early February 2025, New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) shared that the state Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) funds will be exhausted as early as summer 2025. **If this happens, thousands of New York City children will be losing access to child care assistance. UJA is urging City Council members and the Adams' Administration to work with State legislative leaders to ensure that New York City has the funding necessary in the New York State enacted budget to prevent the loss of these essential child care vouchers.**

State CCBG funds are used to provide: child care assistance for families including those on cash assistance, contracted child care for children 0 to 5 years old and extended day/year care for 3 and 4 year olds, and child care vouchers for low-income families engaged in work, training, or other qualified activities. ACS has stated



that New York City is close to exhausting available state CCBG funds due to the increased market rates implemented by New York State, which have not been funded by the state. Counties are required to use these rates to reimburse child care providers serving children who receive subsidies. There will also be an increased need for child care for families on cash assistance due to New York City fully re-instituting work and training engagement requirements to receive child care assistance. ACS is mandated to provide subsidized child care to families on cash assistance in need of child care and this population will continue to be served moving forward. However, the non-mandated populations who benefit from these vouchers will be at risk of losing this benefit.

Affordable child care in New York City is increasingly out of reach for families –especially those with children under age five. The financial strain threatens the economic stability of families across New York City, particularly low-income families. Families who receive child care assistance can continue to work or pursue education and/or training programs that will advance their careers and increase their earning potential. Any cuts to child care assistance will negatively impact families as well as the providers who oversee their children's care. Families unable to access child care assistance will struggle to afford care, creating a ripple effect on providers by impacting enrollment and harming their businesses.

ACS has stated that New York City will need an estimated \$2.006 billion included in the FY 2026 New York State budget for the City's Child Care Assistance Program in order to continue to serve the same number of children moving forward. The FY 26 New York State Executive Budget and New York State Senate One House budget included no additional funds for the child care assistance program. The One House Budget from the New York State Assembly included an additional investment in the child care assistance program of \$212 million. This is a fraction of the money needed to maintain access to the Child Care Assistance Program.

**UJA is requesting City Council members and the Adams' Administration work with New York State legislative leaders to secure a minimum of a \$500 million additional investment in the Child Care Assistance Program to help maintain the current capacity of the Child Care Assistance Program in New York City.** In recent years, the Child Care Assistance Program expanded and benefits some of the poorest families that live in New York City. This expansion should be maintained and New York City families continue to access this important benefit in the future. This will be impossible without an at least \$500 million investment from New York State in the Child Care Assistance Program.

### **Conclusion**

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist New York City's most vulnerable and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, please contact me at [behumf@ujafedny.org](mailto:behumf@ujafedny.org).





**UNITED  
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HOUSES**

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**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:  
Committee on Children & Youth Services  
Council Member Althea Stevens, Chair**

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst  
March 20th, 2025**

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 800,000 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.

Youth programming has played a significant role throughout the history of New York City by engaging young people in programming that can expand their minds and opportunities, connecting families to other essential supports beyond after school, and helping youth navigate challenging times. It is crucial that New York City maintain and invest in its youth and community development programs to provide all New Yorkers with opportunities to learn, grow, play, and access resources and opportunities to better their lives.

This testimony will focus on recommendations to support and stabilize citywide youth services and strengthen the human services workforce including:

- Commit to fully funding afterschool programs by investing \$154 million this year;
- Pilot an alternative summer program model for middle school youth;
- Maintain the \$16.5 million total in discretionary funding for the City Council's Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project;
- Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative;
- Restore and baseline the Promise NYC program with a \$25 million annual investment;
- Submit Waiver of Hardship to the State to access Raise the Age funds;
- Reduce barriers preventing asylum seeking families from accessing youth-serving programs.

## Commit to Fully Funding Afterschool Programs

COMPASS/SONYC programs provide afterschool and summer programming to school-aged youth across the city. Settlement houses collectively operate 140 school-based after-school programs. COMPASS/SONYC programs have struggled in recent years with low staff wages which have led to recruitment and retention challenges, as well as vacancies due to delays in the DOHMH Comprehensive Background Check process.

In January of 2025, afterschool providers received communication from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) that their contracts would be extended through Summer 2028. However, as with past contract extensions, this extension will include no increase to their base funding rates, leaving the program stuck with its original funding structure. The stale base funding in the face of increasingly higher costs has left programs financially unsustainable, has exacerbated the staffing shortage crisis, and jeopardizes program quality. **This disinvestment is unacceptable and the City must commit to funding higher base rates for afterschool programs in the FY26 budget to maintain the stability of NYC's afterschool system.**

In November 2023, UNH released a report that detailed the actual cost of running an afterschool program, including a sample budget - [Assessing the True Cost of Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Programming in New York City](#). Based on this assessment, the City should fund COMPASS Elementary programs at a rate of \$6600 per participant, and SONYC Middle School programs at a rate of \$5500 per participant. The City must commit to phasing in these rates by funding a halfway increase in the FY26 budget. The chart below shows a breakdown of the number of slots of each program model and funding rate, as well as the total funding needed to bring current contracts up to fully funded rates.

| Current Rate               | # of Slots | FY26 Phase 1 Increased Rate                | Additional Funding for Phase 1 Rate | FY27 Fully Funded Rates                            | Additional Funding Needed to Fully Fund |
|----------------------------|------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>COMPASS Elementary</i>  |            |  |                                     |  |   |
| \$2800                     | 31,456     | \$4900                                     | \$66,057,600                        | \$6600   | \$119,532,800                           |
| \$3200                     | 15,728     | \$4900                                     | \$26,737,600                        | \$6600   | \$53,475,200                            |
| <i>SONYC Middle School</i> |            |  |                                     |  |   |
| \$3200                     | 64,768     | \$4150                                     | \$61,529,600                        | \$5500   | \$148,966,400                           |
|                            |            | <b>Additional Funding Needed for FY26:</b> | <b>\$154,324,800</b>                | <b>Additional Funding Needed for Full Funding:</b> | <b>\$321,974,400</b>                    |

**The City should increase funding to the COMPASS system by \$154,324,800 in the FY26 budget to get programs halfway to full funding.** With a forthcoming RFP, the City must add an

additional \$321,974,400 in funding to the COMPASS system to achieve per participant funding rates of \$6600 and \$5500 for COMPASS Elementary and SONYC programs, respectively.

Finally, we urge DYCD to work with providers to develop a plan for serving youth with disabilities in COMPASS/SONYC programs. Recommendations include:

- Providing funding for paraprofessional support and allow that paraprofessional staff to report directly to CBO staff;
- Enable CBOs to hire experts and trainers in multiple modalities of learning to support Education Specialists and other existing staff;
- Give program staff access to assistive technologies (and training on how to use them) like communicators (including speech-to-text devices), computer access tools, hearing and visual aids, and more present in their community centers; and
- Issue clear protocols for CBOs to seek out support when integrating a youth with a disability and have programs available to refer these youth to if the current arrangement is not fulfilling that young person's needs.

### **Pilot an Alternative Summer Program Model for Middle School Youth**

Despite having completed four years of Summer Rising, the City has released little data on its efficacy and has not conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the model. In response to questions from settlement houses and their communities about the efficacy of this model, UNH conducted a study of Summer Rising, composed of a digital survey of 700 parents and CBO providers, and 7 focus groups of middle school participants. In November 2024, UNH released [\*One Size Does Not Fit All: Assessing the Efficacy of the Summer Rising Program in Meeting the Needs of New York City Families\*](#). Some of our key findings were:

1. Many families are dependent on free summer programming provided by the city. 58% of surveyed parents said they did not have a back-up option if Summer Rising was not available, with the percentage rising to 64% for low-income families.
2. Middle schoolers expressed frustration with the DOE-led academics. 87% of focus group participants disagreed or felt neutral in regards to the statement "I feel engaged in the morning session" of Summer Rising."
3. Despite recognizing the value of summer academic enrichment, many parents participating in the survey expressed frustration over a lack of communication around the DOE-led academic program. Parents reported being unclear about what curriculum was being used, who their students' teachers were, and if their child's learning needs were being met. This was in contrast to reports of regular communication from the CBO staff.
4. There are widespread concerns whether students with IEPs and English Language Learners are receiving appropriate accommodations. Over half of CBO staff said that a shortage of paraprofessional support for students with IEPs was one of the most pressing challenges. Additionally, some focus group participants who identify as English Language Learners shared that they were excluded from the DOE-led academic portion and given arts & crafts projects instead.

On March 13, 2025, the Department of Education released the *Summer Rising 2024 Impact Analysis*<sup>1</sup>, which used spring 2024 and fall 2024 standardized academic data to compare the academic performance of young people who participated in Summer Rising to those who did not participate in the program.<sup>2</sup> From this data, we can see that there were moderate academic gains in the elementary school participants. However, this was not true for middle school students. Even for middle school participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days, there was no statistically significant impact on Math scores. Furthermore, when compared to other students in the City, middle school Summer Rising participants who attended Summer Rising programming for 20+ days actually fared worse in reading scores than the comparison group. DOE's own impact analysis supports our findings that Summer Rising is not an appropriate model for all middle school youth.

With an early restoration of summer programming for FY26, **the City should use a portion of the dedicated summer funding to pilot alternative summer programming models for middle school students.**

The summer months offer young people a break from the traditional school schedule, and allow more time for outside play, postsecondary exploration, field trips, positive peer socialization, and hands-on learning activities. Higher-income families often have the option to pick from different summer options depending on their child's preference, but most low-income families are reliant on city-funded programs to ensure a safe summer placement. Youth and families should have a voice in deciding what kind of programming is right for them, and, if youth, parents, and staff are reporting frustration with the current model, the City should pivot to alternative models that have the potential to re-engage them. Allowing for multiple summer programming models<sup>3</sup> would also provide district-level flexibility to better serve English Language Learners and students with disabilities. In the current model, there is little room for flexibility and limited resources to provide these young people with the proper support.

### **Maintain the \$16.5 million total in discretionary funding for the City Council's Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project.**

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. No-cost community-based adult literacy programs such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs enable New Yorkers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their families. Adult literacy programs run by settlement houses

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[https://pwsblobprd.schools.nyc/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summer-rising-2024-impact-analysis-web-deck.pdf?sfvrsn=62dd096a\\_2](https://pwsblobprd.schools.nyc/prd-pws/docs/default-source/default-document-library/summer-rising-2024-impact-analysis-web-deck.pdf?sfvrsn=62dd096a_2)

<sup>2</sup> There is not sufficient information provided to know if the comparison group of young people who did not participate in Summer Rising did participate in alternative summer programming.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of alternative summer programming models are provided in our [Recommendations for Summer 2025](#) document.

and other community-based organizations often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

The wave of newcomers to New York City since 2022 has increased the need for adult literacy education. Adult literacy education is especially critical to helping new and long-time immigrant New Yorkers build skills and knowledge, as ESOL classes allow students to learn English grammar, practical information, and technology skills that they are able to use after they leave the classroom.

In FY25, DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new geographical restrictions, limiting the eligibility of organizations to apply for funding based on their location, and these changes left a lot of organizations without funding to sustain their adult literacy programs. In response, the City Council increased funding for adult literacy initiatives to \$16.5 million in FY25. This was an impactful increase that has been critical for sustaining programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations.

The City Council's \$16.5 million Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project currently fund 62 programs, including 15 programs run by UNH members, that reach thousands of adults. For four UNH settlement house adult literacy program providers (CAMBA, Center for Family Life, Queens Community House and Sunnyside Community Services), City Council discretionary funding is the sole funding source sustaining these programs, and they have served or expect to serve more than 3,100 students collectively. Without renewed funding, organizations excluded from the current DYCD literacy portfolio will not be able to offer adult literacy classes after June 30th of this year.

It is necessary for adult learners to have stable programs and support, as continued City Council funding supports staffing and essential program infrastructure and thousands of adult learners depend on these programs for essential skills. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic priority for programming, **it is crucial that the City Council continue this \$16.5 million support to make sure that adult learners continue to have access to quality classes.**

### **Create a \$3 Million Youth Mental Health Council Initiative**

The COVID-19 pandemic had long-lasting effects on young people, including their mental health. During the first few months of the pandemic, 1 in 600 Black children and 1 in 700 Latinx children lost their parent or caregiver to the pandemic in New York State, more than double the rate of white children. Losing a caregiver is associated with a range of negative health effects, including lower self-esteem, a higher risk of suicide, and symptoms of mental illness. According to pediatricians, addressing the impact of family death on young people will "require intentional investment to address individual, community, and structural inequalities." In late 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) declared a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health; and the Surgeon General followed suit by declaring a Youth Mental Health Crisis. Furthermore, according to a 2022 survey from the Institute of Education Sciences, 69 percent of public schools reported an increase in students seeking

mental health services that year, but 43 percent of schools “moderately agreed” that they could “effectively provide mental health service to all students in need.” Only 13 percent “strongly agreed.”

Given these growing mental health needs among young people, we propose using approximately \$3 million in new Council Initiative funds to create a new Youth Mental Health initiative. This new initiative would provide flexible mental health services for youth programs run by CBOs – such as Beacons, Cornerstones, COMPASS/SONYC, and others—with a focus on out-of-school time. Programs would be able to hire mental health professionals who are trained to engage young people, lead structured group activities, or test other innovative, tailored solutions to youth mental health needs – much in the same way the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative functions for older adults. These funds could also offer supports for youth workers when dealing with mental health crises, or creating proactive programming for mental health wellness.

The communities facing the highest risk for mental health concerns are the same communities who have historically lacked access to appropriate mental health services. It is generally accepted that youth mental health services are more effective when provided in a safe and trusted setting, which makes CBO-led youth programs the perfect environment for these supports. If we genuinely want to confront this crisis, it is vital that our young people have access to comprehensive mental health services that address the many stressors they are facing with substantive and professional care.

### **Restore and Baseline Promise NYC with a \$25 million Annual Investment**

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). Since the program launched in FY23, providers have been reporting full enrollment and long waitlists, which demonstrates the need and desire from families to have these seats.

Promise NYC was funded at \$25 million in the City’s FY 2025 budget, and this increased investment has helped clear waitlists across the program. However, this funding was not baselined, so programs are anticipating that child care will end on June 30th and families will abruptly be left without a child care arrangement. We urge the City to **restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC** in the FY 2026 budget so that families can continue to access the affordable, subsidized child care they need.

### **Submit Waiver of Hardship to the State to Access Raise the Age Funds**

Last fall marked five years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Prior to the passing of this legislation, thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked-out of age-appropriate services in family court programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses. Evidence from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. However, it would be possible for New York City to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our City and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. Again, New York City accounts for half of the state's youth justice system population and therefore should be able to access additional funding to support this population. However, Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's reluctance to baseline funding for programs that were restored for only one year in the FY25 budget. The supportive services in danger of being cut if not restored in the FY25 budget include:

- \$12 million for restorative justice programs, and
- \$14 million for Community Schools, which provide young people and families with wrap-around supports.

It is critical to invest in programs and organizations that are serving our communities through youth development, violence-prevention services, and other alternatives to incarceration to prevent the necessity of further investment in the carceral system. **We therefore urge the Council to pressure the Adams Administration to submit a letter with the waiver of hardship to the New York State Office of Children and Families to allow New York City to be considered for the funding.** This would be beneficial for young people and community-based organizations offering these services alike.

### **Reduce Barriers Preventing Asylum Seeking Families from Accessing Youth-Serving Programs**

Even with the creation of Promise NYC, newly arrived families face many hurdles in accessing child care and youth programs – challenges that New York's CBOs are unable to address without financial and administrative support from the City.

Settlement houses have been welcoming immigrant New Yorkers since their founding in the late 19th century, and today's wave of the newest New Yorkers is no exception. Settlement houses are experts at pivoting services to support the most urgent needs in their neighborhoods. According to a September 2023 survey of UNH members, 72% reported an increased presence of asylum seekers in their youth programs.<sup>4</sup>

However, settlement houses have described several barriers to young people and families engaging in these programs:

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<sup>4</sup> UNH, *Settlement Houses Supporting the Newest New Yorkers: Voices from the Field*, [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991539/UNH\\_Voices\\_from\\_the\\_Field\\_Report\\_1252023%281%29.pdf?1702991539](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/unhny/pages/12/attachments/original/1702991539/UNH_Voices_from_the_Field_Report_1252023%281%29.pdf?1702991539)



- Lack of transportation - Youth residing in shelters who participate in afterschool programming are not able to take advantage of free bussing that is provided at the end of the school day.
- Need for additional bilingual staff - With an increase of youth whose first language is not English, providers have stated a need for additional bilingual staff who can support youth in their own language. This issue is compounded by the persistent staffing shortage in early childhood and school-aged youth programs due to low wages.
- Inconsistency due to 60-day shelter timeline - Even when families are able to overcome other barriers to enroll their young people in child care or afterschool programs, they may receive notice and be required to move sites, displacing young people from the program they were enrolled in.

Especially with the current threats from federal actions, the City's inability to provide consistency for immigrant youth and provide supports to keep them enrolled in child care and afterschool programs is a missed opportunity to support our newest New Yorkers. **For the City to appropriately tackle this issue, it must simultaneously invest in afterschool, early childhood education, and youth mental health services, while removing barriers to access.** We look forward to working with the Council to address many of these existing challenges and work toward solutions.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at [kconnolly@unhny.org](mailto:kconnolly@unhny.org).



**NYC Council Committee on Children & Youth  
FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing  
Thursday, March 20, 2025**

**Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)**

Thank you, Chair Stevens and the Committee on Children & Youth, for the opportunity to testify on the FY 26 budget for DYCD and ACS. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, is a non-profit organization with an over 40-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age. While our primary focus and direct services are around access to high quality, culturally responsive and sustaining early learning and school-aged education, we understand that many intersectional circumstances and experiences within the community impact the well-being of children and their family support structures. As such, we deliver holistically responsive services within the schools, early care and learning programs, and wider communities we serve across NYC, through and beyond our state and city contracted programs and services.

**Overview of Our Services**

CHCF's Early Care and Education team supports childcare and early learning programs, and family access to childcare (birth through school-age) in our work as a Child Care Resource & Referral (CCRC) Agency<sup>1</sup> and as a Family Child Care Network under the Department of Education. CHCF additionally engages providers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), supporting the nutrition of children in the communities through their childcare program. Our Youth Development team delivers after-school programming in partnership with three schools in the Bronx and career and college readiness programming to high school juniors and seniors at four schools in Manhattan and the Bronx. Above and beyond the academic supports we offer in our school-based programs, we support mental health and social emotional development, student interest and career exploration, and connection to additional resources and opportunities beyond the school walls. Our Social Services team oversees direct supports and services at one of the hotel-based shelters for asylum seekers in Long Island City, ensuring culturally and linguistically responsive and trauma informed support to newly arrived families navigating complex city systems. Finally, our Community Empowerment Department enhances our general delivery of comprehensive supports in direct program spaces, expanding the reach of our agency services and supports beyond these physical spaces into the surrounding communities, addressing several issues, reflective of the needs of the families and communities (i.e. housing, immigration, food access, healthcare access, etc.).





## **School-Based Youth Development Programming**

During a school year, CHCF provides after-school programming at three different schools in the Bronx, with a typical capacity to reach 550 students, and by extension their families. Two of our programs were primarily funded by state funds through the previous Advantage and Empire State After School contracts. While the state listened to advocates about the need to merge the funding streams and create equitable funding for all seats, the state failed to increase the budget allocation to ensure that statewide program capacity was sustained. CHCF was one of over 200 organizational programs statewide that were approved to deliver services through LEAPS by OCFS but were not funded to deliver those services. CHCF, for example, was forced to reduce its enrollment capacity by about 50% for the 2024-2025 school year. We know that the harm of this was felt far beyond CHCF, across NYC school districts and communities. We name this state funding issue here because CHCF, along with many other advocacy groups and several council members on this committee and beyond, support concerted efforts to continue growing available childcare, including out-of-school-time care, towards eventual universality. While we are advocating with our state legislators to ensure that the funding is right sized, and continues growing statewide, we want to also ensure that the NYC administration and council are committed to strategically growing city investments, so that we can continue to expand access to these important and impactful programs.

CHCF continues to demonstrate the impact of connecting and supporting community-based organization partnerships with schools, which demonstrably strengthens the ability to holistically meet the unique needs of students and their families. CBO partners, like CHCF, help to facilitate the connection of families with resources and services, both within our respective agencies and with other CBOs and agencies in the community and city that might function outside of educational spaces. CHCF therefore continually calls on the city to safeguard programs that have invested in such partnerships with schools and increase student and family access to opportunities, resources, and services.

In addition to the afterschool programs we deliver through state LEAPS and NYC SONYC, CHCF has also partnered with DYCD and NYCPS to deliver Summer Rising at PS/MS 279. We support the continued advocacy for summer programming by this committee and agree that we must continue to invest in what families need. While the Summer Rising model isn't perfect, it has been wonderful for families to have a safe space for their children to be while the caregivers are working, where they can remain engaged in their academics and can also participate in enrichment activities. We call on funding for Summer Rising to be baselined and increased to reflect the anticipated enrollment demand for the Summer of 2025. In 2024, we continued to see confusion amongst families about accessing the program and ultimately a shortfall in available seats to meet the community needs, leaving families scrambling just before the end of the school year to figure out alternative arrangements for their children. These programs, if developed and delivered through a strong partnership between schools and CBOs, and an ongoing method of communication and feedback, could be a game changer for our students, families, and communities.

CHCF additionally delivers college and career readiness programming to high school students in Manhattan and the Bronx through our Opening Doors to the Future program. This impactful program works through Work Learn Grow funding and additional resources secured by our organization, to



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support youth connections to professional internship opportunities, and build their understanding of expectations in a professional workplace. ODF further supports participants in building their resumes, learning to identify their marketable skills with an eye towards growing their strengths, addressing challenges, and pursuing their interests as they plan for the future. Over the years, all students who have gone through this program have successfully been promoted to the next grade level or have graduated, with the overwhelming majority moving on to college following graduation.<sup>1</sup> It is with this critical and impactful CHCF programming in mind, that we stand in solidarity with all programs focused on building college and career readiness for high schoolers. Whether it is SYEP, WLG, or Learning to Work – these programs *all* demonstrably uplift student academic growth, open opportunities to connect with professional workplace experiences, and in many cases contribute to the financial stability of their families through paid internships.

### **Early Care and Learning Programming**

As one of four Child Care Resource & Referral agencies in the NYC CCR&R Consortium, we are funded by New York State through Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds to support families in accessing child care that is responsive to their family's culture, language, schedule, and particular child needs; and support their navigation of often complex bureaucratic systems to access free/affordable child care. Parents/guardians can be connected to CHCF or any of the CCR&Rs through 311 if they are looking for care, birth through school age, and if they need support in determining potential eligibility for subsidy/vouchers and in navigating city systems of access.

Additionally, through our work as a NYC CCR&R, CHCF supports child care providers with linguistically responsive technical assistance and intensive coaching. CHCF predominantly (but not exclusively) delivers supports to child care providers in residential settings (Group Family and Family Day Care), and whose primary language is Spanish, across all five boroughs of New York City.

CHCF continues to identify barriers faced by providers and families that are jeopardizing the stability of the childcare sector as well as family and community stability. There have been continued difficulties in accessing CCAP vouchers for families and timely payments to providers. At a time when the childcare sector is dangerously close to collapse after a long history of being under-funded and under-supported, we need to do all we can grow investments in the sector, ensuring equitable resourcing and sustainable funding. Further impacting childcare programs sustainability is under-enrollment because of system barriers for families to accessing subsidy and being connected to programs that would best meet their family and child's needs.

Providers continue to report challenges with reimbursement for care, which stagnates the flow of funds needed to keep programs up and running. Advocates statewide have called on the state OCFS to implement prospective payments based on enrollment. During the pandemic, NYC adopted pay by enrollment, which provided some semblance of stability at a time when enrollment and attendance were uncertain. Prospective payments based on enrollment would ensure that providers receive the necessary funds to deliver programs for the month, rather than being left to the uncertainty of the reimbursement

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<sup>1</sup> CHCF Youth Development FY 2024. [Final Youth Development FY 2024.pdf](#)





schedule. CHCF supports a move towards a more stable funding model for childcare programs that serve children with subsidies, as one step towards stabilizing the sector.

An issue that may have been contributing to delays in reimbursement could stem from the deficit that ACS has reported around CCAP funding. While ACS and advocates are still pushing on the state to increase its investment in CCAP to cover the current (FY25) deficit and ensure the city can continue enrolling families going forward (FY26 and beyond), it is critical that this committee is acutely attentive to the risk that this funding crisis could create for families, children, and childcare providers.

ACS has already alerted advocates that if the necessary funds are not allocated by the state, we could see a freeze to family enrollment to CCAP beginning as early as April; further, as currently enrolled families come up for recertification, we would see an increase in family removals from CCAP. The disruption in the flow and growth of enrollment of families into programs will be particularly felt in communities with higher rates of low-income families, as the families who enroll in those community programs are more likely to utilize vouchers to afford the high costs of care. While some programs are able to enroll private pay families to offset the inadequate funding of the vouchers, there are a significant number of programs – and disproportionately licensed programs in residential settings (FDC & GFDC) in low-income communities – who almost entirely serve families with vouchers. NYC cannot afford to see this level of disruption and will need to act with intention to ensure that these enrollment freezes and removals from CCAP do not happen. Every district across the city would feel these harms, both amongst their families and throughout the childcare programs in the district.

It is also essential that NYC continue to support *all* NYC children in accessing early care and learning, regardless of their eligibility for federal funding-backed subsidies. We continue to celebrate Promise NYC and its success in supporting the care of over 600 children who are deemed ineligible for federally funded child care solely due to their immigration status. As the need is far greater than current funding allows, CHCF supports continued increases in funding to grow the reach and impact of Promise NYC. Especially at a time when the nation climate instills fear and isolation in immigrant communities, NYC must continue to step up and demonstrate its commitment to supporting immigrant New Yorkers.

Finally, CHCF continues to partner with 16 other community-based organizations under the City's First Readers Initiative. Together, we deliver early childhood education programming across every Council district, ensuring that families have access to critical early learning opportunities. Our work is not just about books—it's about equitably building strong foundations for children's academic success, emotional well-being, and long-term stability.

City's First Readers organizations remain unwavering in our commitment to serve *every* child. We are on the frontlines, ensuring that *all* families have access to the educational support they need, regardless of zip code, economic status, culture, language, or immigration status. We must ensure that programs like City's First Readers are safeguarded and grown further to ensure equitable early learning opportunities for our youngest New Yorkers, at a point in their development when 90% of brain development occurs.





Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy, at: [ddemeuse@chcfinc.org](mailto:ddemeuse@chcfinc.org) or [REDACTED]



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**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUTH TESTIMONY  
JENNIFER PINDER, YOU GOTTA BELIEVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
MARCH 20, 2025**

Chair Stevens and members of the Children and Youth Committee.:

My name is Jennifer Pinder and I am the Executive Director of You Gotta Believe (YGB), an adoption agency for older youth in foster care.

You Gotta Believe has submitted an ask to the City Council Discretionary Fund for \$2M to support our mission to find permanent homes for older youth in foster care. YGB has received support from the City Council since FY15, and has used those funds to support our Nobody Ages Out Program and to provide wrap-around services for transitional-aged foster youth. Our request this year is for continued support for our Nobody Ages Out Program and wrap-around services, as well as for services to prevent youth from entering the NYC homeless system, and trauma-informed services for foster youth to prevent them from aging out of the foster care system.

For nearly 30 years, You Gotta Believe has been laser-focused on finding loving and unconditionally committed parents for kids in foster care who would otherwise age out to be essentially alone in the world. YGB is the only agency with this focus. We find people interested in becoming parents and train them to parent traumatized children who are resistant to being loved and have a way of pushing everyone away to avoid more hurt and trauma. Everyone on our program staff are credible messengers – either parents of older youth from care or survivors of the foster care system themselves. This gives the YGB staff an advantage in being able to both train and support parents and youth to help them maintain their relationship and avoid the typical disruptions that happen to older youth.

YGB primarily serves foster youth in NYC between 10-24 years old. Many have experienced unfathomable abuse and neglect and have significant trauma to work through and process. We focus our work on these “hardest to place” youth because we dedicate the resources it takes to create enduring families. The overwhelming majority of the youth we work with are black or brown. We also focus on serving LGBTQ foster youth because they are overrepresented in the foster care system (15-25% of the population). Approximately 25% of the youth we serve identify as LGBTQ; 15% of our parents identify as LGBTQ. In a time when LGBTQ fostering and adoption is under attack and illegal in many states, YGB prides itself in being a safe place for LGBTQ parents and youth to create families.

There are multiple efforts in place to provide various forms of support to kids aging out of the system, i.e., coaches and mentors and other “services.” These services do not take the place of a family and are time-limited. We’d like to see family incorporated into this solution. People do not stop needing family support at the age of 21.



Youth who age out alone face homelessness, continued welfare dependence, and often immediately join the pipeline to incarceration. These negative outcomes are avoidable for the youth who we connect with permanent unconditionally committed families who are there for a lifetime. Preliminary survey data from the youth and families we've worked with over the years indicate that:

- Compared to YGB youth who are placed with a permanent family (6%), those who age out of NYC foster care without a family are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated (14.7%).
- Further, those who age out at the national level are more than 10 times as likely to be incarcerated (61%) than are YGB youth who are placed with a permanent family (6%).

YGB needs the support of the City Council because we're at capacity and we're relying on you to help us reach more foster youth with our proven model. We need your help to increase our impact and prevent more kids from aging out of foster care without a permanent, loving family.



JUSTICE FROM COURTROOM TO COMMUNITY

**New York City Council**  
**Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Children and families**  
**Spoken Testimony of Carlos Caiza, Youth Advocate**  
**March 20, 2025**

Good afternoon, thank you for having me. My name is Carlos Caiza. I am currently enrolled in ARCHES, an alternative to incarceration program at Youth Justice Network. I am also a member of the Youth Committee hosted by Youth Represent and I'm a senior at Humanities Preparatory Academy high school graduating this year. I am here today to testify about a budget that invests in youth.

New York City currently spends 900 thousand dollars per year on incarcerating a single young person. In New York City 10 thousand dollars could fund an afterschool program for one year. That 900 thousand dollars can be reallocated to those afterschool programs that can also serve as an alternative to incarceration and a way to keep kids out the streets.

In 2001 the budget for these detention centers and other services was 110 million and in 2020 it rose up to 285 million. The real question is now what exactly are the other services this money is going to? Not only is the budget being wasted and handled wrong but there's youth out there that are finding themselves in trouble because they don't have anything to keep them from engaging in negativity. Teens that are arrested often have to deal with repercussions and end up in these detention centers in a space that's overcrowded and where they are mistreated. This can affect them mentally, and continue the cycle of them being lost.

These are all reasons why we need more money into alternatives to incarceration programs and programs where young people can spend their time doing something positive. Two programs that personally helped me are the Arches program at Youth justice network and the Youth committee in Youth Represent. These programs allowed me to learn more and help me grow up. They have given me a second chance and allowed me to change into a better version of myself and become a youth advocate and a youth mentor. Other programs that would benefit youth include programs that offer support with substance abuse, mental health, workforce development programs and mentoring programs.

I'm asking the City Council today to listen to youth like myself and invest in our futures right now through this budget so more youth all over NYC can have the same opportunity to programs that helped me. Thank you for listening.

**New York City Council  
Committee on Children & Youth  
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Children & Youth  
Written Testimony of Youth Represent  
March 20, 2025**

Youth Represent is dedicated to improving the lives and futures of young people impacted by the Criminal Legal System. When the legal system creates barriers to success for youth, we use the law to help them leave the stigma of a criminal record behind. We provide criminal and civil reentry legal representation to young people aged 16-26, assisting them with everything from rapsheet review to school suspensions to employment discrimination and any other legal needs they identify. We also engage in policy advocacy and youth leadership development through our City Dreamers Advocacy Camp, Youth Committee, and Youth Justice & Opportunities Act (YJ&O) Campaign.

Thank you to Chair Stevens, Committee members, and staff for the opportunity to testify today about the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

We wish to highlight that the appendix to this testimony includes copies of spoken testimonies given on behalf of Youth Represent by Jalyll Wright (Appendix A) and Glen Williams (Appendix B), two young people impacted by the criminal legal system in New York City. Both highlight their personal and traumatic histories interacting with the youth justice system. **They ask that, instead of further investment in jails, prisons, youth detention, and probation in NYC, the Council not only funds programs designed for youth coming out of detention, but also funds programming that fosters and cares for each young person BEFORE arrest, including but not limited to sports programs, art programs, mental health programs, political education, and business programs.**

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**1. New York City Must Invest in Resources and Opportunities for Young People - Not Criminalization**

Across New York City's five boroughs, an estimated 37,000<sup>1</sup> young New Yorkers—primarily Black and Brown young people—are drawn into the justice system through arrests, convictions, and incarceration. This is a cycle that will not stop if the City continues to pour money into criminalizing, surveilling, and incarcerating young people before they've had the chance to thrive. Instead, the City needs to continually invest in community-oriented, youth-specific resources and opportunities to keep New York families safe and healthy.

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<sup>1</sup>"Workbook: NYS Arrests by County." Division of Criminal Justice Services, n.d.  
[https://mypublicdashboard.ny.gov/t/OJRP\\_PUBLIC/views/NYSArrestsbyCounty/HistoricalData?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y](https://mypublicdashboard.ny.gov/t/OJRP_PUBLIC/views/NYSArrestsbyCounty/HistoricalData?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y).

a. The City Must Address the Crisis in New York City Secure Detention with a Comprehensive Decarceration Plan

At the June 2024 Joint Oversight Hearing of the Committees on Criminal Justice and Children & Youth on Coordinating the Administration's Youth Decarceration Plan, Youth Represent and our partner organizations testified that Secure Detention and Specialized Secure Detention numbers had increased, imploring the City to invest in alternatives now. The City did not take action, so we are here before you, a year later, testifying that the youth detention numbers continue to increase and intensify urgent overcrowding concerns.

In December 2024, there were 273 youth detained in Crossroads and Horizons,<sup>2</sup> NYC's Secure Detention Centers, despite the maximum bed capacity being 212. For over a year, ACS has been operating under a waiver from the Office of Children and Family Services which allows the agency to circumvent the state law that mandates private bedrooms for youth in secure detention. Under this waiver, young people have been sleeping on cots in hallways and classrooms at Horizon and Crossroads. Temporarily adding beds and continually renewing this waiver is a band-aid that does not adequately or sustainably address overcrowding. The time to consider and act on alternatives is now.

The average monthly population of Secure Detention and Specialized Secure Detention increased by 13% from 2023 to 2024. In 2024 60% of youth in secure detention were Black and 31% were Hispanic, as published by NYC's Administration of Children Services Flash Report for 2024. Black and Brown young people are disproportionately impacted by this overcrowding because they are disproportionately represented in NYC's Secure Detention population.

ACS does not provide adequate data to accurately represent the kinds and severity of charges facing young people held in Secure Detention in NYC. More granular data on arrest charges by borough would better guide allocation of resources to specific programs in the places they are most needed. This lack of data obstructs any effort to understand the problem of overcrowding in these facilities and to develop a comprehensive decarceration plan to identify young people in each borough who could be released with supervision or moved to Alternative to Detention (ATD) / Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) programs while their case is open.

Though ACS has repeatedly stated that 70% of young people in their care are charged with "murder or murder related charges" and that "secure detention no longer holds youth charged with minor charges,"<sup>3</sup> the data published by ACS tells a less clear story. For about a third of young people in secure detention in 2024, it is impossible to tell from the data whether they were charged with a misdemeanor or felony; moreover the published data suggests that at least 11 young people held in Secure Detention in 2024 were charged with only a misdemeanor or violation (data pulled from ACS's Detention Demographic Data for FY2024). And for 246 young people (over 32% of the total detained in Crossroads or Horizons in 2024), it is impossible to

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<sup>2</sup> "Flash Report - Monthly Indicators." NYC Administration for Children's Services, January 2025.

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/data-analysis/flashReports/2025/01.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES." New York City Council, 2024, p. 21.

<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=13181141&GUID=7A055DCF-2604-4026-AD1B-5D1034282D04>.

know whether the top charge was a misdemeanor or felony. We demand adequate and accurate data from ACS to support the effort to depopulate secure detention. To reduce overcrowding and to increase support for these young people, the City urgently needs to create a plan for redirecting eligible young people to non-secure detention and to expand use of supervised or unsupervised release programs.

To address the overcrowding crisis and successfully redirect and depopulate Secure Detention, **the City must expand investments in youth-specific ATDs and ATIs, especially for felony charges.** We know that incarceration has disastrous effects on youth outcomes: residential placements like secure detention centers create obstacles to psychosocial development, making it harder for youth to learn to control impulsive and aggressive behavior, function autonomously, take responsibility for their behavior, and consider other points of view. Research indicates that rather than promote safety, youth detention centers **increase** the probability of recidivism as an adult by between 20-30%. Community-based approaches, by contrast, have been found to lower the recidivism rate by around 5%.

Research from the Sentencing Project lays out a roadmap for effective strategies to reduce youth incarceration and promote public safety and youth development. As we describe below, New York City's excellent youth justice providers already incorporate these strategies into their models, but the City's investment in them is a fraction of what it spends on surveilling, policing, and incarcerating young people.<sup>4</sup>

1. **Credible messenger mentoring programs** hire community residents with a history of involvement in the justice system who provide intensive support to youth and their families, typically as one part of a multi-pronged intervention.

NYC Program Models:

**The Crisis Management System** - this network deploys teams of credible messengers who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence in NYC

- i. Shows an average 40% reduction in gun violence across program areas compared to a 31% reduction in comparison areas

**Cure Violence** - a violence interruption program under the Crisis Management System designed to reduce gun violence, providing street outreach and public awareness. Their work correlates with a reduction in gun violence in historically high-violence neighborhoods (Cure Violence participants include young teenagers)

1. In South Bronx, gun injuries dropped 37%, shooting victimizations dropped 63%
2. In East New York (Brooklyn), gun injuries dropped 50%

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<sup>4</sup> Mendel, Richard. "Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration." The Sentencing Project, June 28, 2023. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/effective-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration/>.

2. **Advocate/Mentor programs, such as Youth Advocate Programs**, assign trained community residents to work intensively with young people and their families, providing support to the families and helping young people avoid delinquency and achieve goals delineated in their individualized case plans.

NYC Program Models:

**Arches** - a transformative mentoring program for young people on probation aged 16-24 who have been deemed high-risk of continued system involvement, had significantly lower rates of felony reconviction compared to similarly-situated young people on probation who were not in the program. This is a group mentoring program, led by credible messenger mentors in community-based organizations:

- i. 69% lower felony reconviction rate after one year on probation
- ii. 57% lower felony reconviction rate after two years

**Advocate Intervene Mentor (AIM)** - a one-on-one mentoring program known as an Alternative to Placement for youth in Family Court who would otherwise be ordered to out-of-home placement (meaning they were deemed among the highest-risk and need youth) had the following impact:

- iii. 90.9% avoided another Family Court adjudication within one year of program enrollment
- iv. 98.4% avoided a Youthful Offender adjudication or felony conviction in criminal court within one year of program enrollment
- v. AND within one year of program completion, only 3% had a Youthful Offender adjudication or felony conviction – compared youth released from facilities who are reconvicted within a year of release at a rate of 25%

3. **Family-focused, multidimensional therapy models**, such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) employ specially trained therapists who follow detailed protocols to identify and confront factors that propel a young person toward delinquent conduct, with a heavy focus on working with family members to support youth success.

NYC Program Models:

**CASES IMPACT**- A model that uses home-based family therapy and wrap-around services and that was successfully used by Esperanza in New York City for a decade to support youth charged with serious offenses in the community, preventing detention and incarceration. The New York City Department of Probation shifted the contract from Esperanza to CASES in 2023 but then cut the funding to CASES before the program was allowed to begin. The City has no plan to replace this critical program.



4. **Cognitive behavioral therapy plus mentors for youth and young adults** at extreme risk, like the programs offered by Roca, Inc., engage youth and young adults living in violence-torn neighborhoods who are at extreme risk for future incarceration. Roca youth workers provide participants with cognitive behavioral therapy and connect them with education, employment, and other relevant services.
5. **Restorative Justice interventions targeting youth** accused of serious offenses provide an alternative to traditional court. These programs typically involve victims, and they culminate in a conference where victims, accused youth, and caring adults in their lives meet to discuss the harm caused by the offense and craft plans for the youth to “make things right” and to avoid subsequent offending and achieve success.
6. **Wraparound programs assign a care coordinator** to develop individualized plans offering an array of services to assist children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances – sometimes including youth facing serious delinquency charges – who might otherwise be placed into residential facilities.

Many of the pre-existing programming in NYC use a combination of the listed approaches to ATI above. These strategies are already being implemented by CURE violence programs, reentry and legal services providers, and other programs that serve system-involved youth. These programs include: exalt, Drive Change, CASES, We Build the Block, Fortune, Osborne, Youth Justice Network, YouthBuild, Summer Youth Employment Program, among others.

**The city must expand investments in this continuum of services for court-involved youth to decrease reliance on secure detention. This includes:**

1. **Increased funding for alternative to incarceration, alternative to detention, and supervised release programs available in the youth parts and family court in all five boroughs.** Resources are not just needed to execute programs, but for court liaisons to work with young people, defense attorneys, prosecutors and judges to connect young people to appropriate programs. Resources are needed to increase capacity and the length of programming for young people with more complex needs. And funding streams must be flexible so that young people can access the programs that they need, regardless of what court they are in and the posture of the case.
2. **Prevention should always be the first choice.** Funding streams but be flexible enough to serve youth and connect them to services before arrest, especially mentoring, education, enrichment. The City must coordinate across agencies (DYCD, DOP, ACS, MOCJ, DOE) to ensure robust resources and opportunities for youth. In New York City and nationally, Black students are suspended at 3-4 times the rate of their white peers and are more likely to experience disciplinary responses that involve the criminal justice



system.<sup>5</sup> Specific interventions and resources should be available to any student facing school suspension to ensure they continue their education.

The key finding of the Sentencing Project's research is that:

*Expanding the use of these programs is necessary for youth justice systems to reduce overreliance on incarceration. However, to make a meaningful difference, these programs **must be embedded in youth justice systems that strive to steer youth away from more intensive court supervision at every stage of the process** and that explore all available options to keep young people at home and in their communities. Youth justice systems must also make concerted efforts to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in youth confinement.*

*In the end, the most essential ingredient for reducing overreliance on youth incarceration will be a determination to seize every opportunity to keep young people living safely at home with their parents and families, in their schools and communities.<sup>6</sup>*

Investing in a robust continuum of services must be complemented by extensive reforms to NYC and NYS youth justice systems to reduce the city and state's overreliance on incarceration and detention programs. These reforms include:

- **Passage of #ErasetheDatabase (Int 0798 - Stevens)**  
A local law that would abolish the NYPD's criminal group database and prohibit the establishment of a successor database to reduce racial profiling and criminalization of Black and Brown people in NYC's most under-resourced and over-policed neighborhoods.
- **Passage of the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act (A5293 - Walker; S4330 - Myrie)**  
State legislation that would expand alternatives to incarceration, diversion, and immediate record sealing for young people who are arrested in New York. It recognizes that emerging adults—young people ages 18 to 25—have unique needs and tremendous potential. Rather than punishing risk-taking and mistakes with harsh sentencing and the barriers that accompany an adult criminal conviction, YJ&O provides for effective, age-appropriate interventions to move

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<sup>5</sup> Lissy, Dr. Rachel. "Intended Consequences and Explicit Bias: The Roots of Racialized Disproportionality in NYC Discipline Policy | NYU Steinhardt." Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/intended-consequences-and-explicit-bias-roots-racialized-disproportionality-ny-c>.

<sup>6</sup> Mendel, "Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration."

young people out of the criminal legal system and into education, stability, and economic opportunity.

- **The passage of #Right2RemainSilent: Children's Early Access to Counsel Legislation (A2620 - Hevesi / S878A - Bailey)**  
State legislation that would protect children's right to remain silent by creating a non-waivable requirement for consultation with a lawyer for children under 18 before questioning by police.
  - **The passage of the Youth Justice Innovation Fund (A767 - Solages / S643 - Cleare)**  
The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would direct \$50 million to community-based organizations to provide a continuum of services from prevention, early intervention, to alternatives to detention, placement and incarceration for youth aged 12 through 25. The Innovation Fund builds on successful state-wide efforts like Project RISE, which has brought over \$30 million to communities to combat gun violence through public health strategies, including credible messenger and violence interruption programs.
- b. The Administration Has Failed to Take Steps to Access Critical Raise the Age Funds from New York State

Last fall marked five years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16-and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Prior to the passing of this legislation, thousands of 16-and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked-out of age-appropriate services in family court programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses. Evidence from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. However, it is possible to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our city and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. New York City accounts for half of the state's youth justice system population and should be able to access more funding. However, Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's claim that the current fiscal cliff necessitates drastic cuts to many of the supportive services and programs that are vital to New York City's youth and families.

## **2. #CLOSERIKERS**

At a cost of over half a million dollars per person per year, Rikers Island is the most expensive and least effective tool our City has to create safety. In addition to exposing people to rampant abuse and violence, Rikers Island wastes resources that are desperately needed for housing, treatment, education, and other investments. Mayor Adams' proposed budget continues to misappropriate funds that are needed for real public safety investments by maintaining DOC budget bloat while cutting funds to alternative to incarceration and reentry programs - including those that serve New York's most vulnerable young people - and failing to adequately fund supportive housing and community-based mental health treatment. These resources are essential for New Yorkers of all ages and are especially crucial for young people. As of this week over 1,300 young people aged 18-25 are being held at Rikers.

Preliminary budget analysis:

- **DOCs budget is still bloated**, with the Mayor proposing to spend \$2.87 billion on jail operations alone in FY2026. In addition, the administration is planning either to continue overusing incarceration or to employ almost twice as many correctional officers as people in custody by FY2028. Either option makes no sense, morally or financially.
- **Commitments in the Close Rikers plan are still inadequately funded**: the administration agreed to yet has not followed through on establishing 380 more units of Justice Involved Supportive Housing, a model that has been hugely successful in reducing jail, shelter, and hospital stays, and generating substantial cost savings.
  - The Close Rikers Plan also promised "A new community-based mental health safety net." This administration has clearly fallen short of that goal - the number of people in Rikers diagnosed with a serious mental illness has increased by more than 60% since January 2022 without sufficient investments in community-based interventions and care.
- **Reentry and alternative to incarceration programs face cuts**: The administration is proposing \$8M in cuts to reentry services, while a key commitment in the [plan to Close Rikers](#) was to "Enhance Reentry and Discharge Planning Services Available to Everyone Leaving City Jails," as evidence recommends.<sup>7</sup>
  - The administration is proposing \$3.8 million in cuts to alternative to incarceration programs. Opportunities to divert people from Rikers should be fully utilized, in collaboration with the Jail Population Review Initiative that the Council established last year through Local Law 75-2023. Expanding alternatives to incarceration was also a key commitment in the plan to close Rikers.
- **Jail oversight cuts are proposed**: DOC continues to [violate minimum standards](#) established by the Board of Correction, including [continued illegal use of solitary confinement](#); revelations of [sexual abuse claims on Rikers spanning decades](#); and recent disclosure of [DOC officers "deadlocking" people with severe mental health needs](#). Strong oversight is crucial. BOC needs more staff to fulfill its mandate, but the Mayor

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<sup>7</sup> "Successful Reentry: Exploring Funding Models to Support Rehabilitation, Reduce Recidivism." National Conference of State Legislatures, Updated June 21, 2023.  
<https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/the-importance-of-funding-reentry-programs>.

proposes [reducing their staff from 35 to 30 positions, and cutting BOC's budget by \\$210,418 \(5%\)](#).

In order to follow through on the legal and moral obligation to Close Rikers, City Council must secure a budget that will improve community safety and reduce our City's overreliance on incarceration. It's time to use our precious resources to fund the things that work.

Priorities for this year's budget to advance the closure of Rikers:

- **Allocate at least an additional \$39.8M to meet housing and mental health needs,** and fulfill commitments in the Close Rikers plan, including:
  - Building on the City Council's investment last year, the administration must appropriate **\$4.8 million more in annual funding for [Justice Involved Supportive Housing](#)**, and reissue the RFP for 380 new units with service funding levels in line with those of similar supportive housing programs. This will enable the City to deliver on the Close Rikers Points of Agreement to expand JISH to 500 units.
  - **Allocate \$22M more to create 15 more [Intensive Mobile Treatment](#) teams.** The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people.
  - **Allocate \$7M more to create more [Forensic Assertive Community Treatment](#) teams** and cut the long wait times (average of 6 to 12 months) to access this service.
  - **Allocate \$6M more to open four new crisis respite centers,** in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.
- **Fully restore cuts to the Office of Criminal Justice** for ATI (\$3.8M) and reentry (\$8M) programs. The budget should also go further, and increase discretionary funding for alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) by \$2.4 million to enhance and support the scaling of ATIs citywide as requested by the [ATI/Reentry Coalition](#).
- **Fully restore cuts to the Board of Correction and increase their headcount** to at least 1% of the number of people in DOC custody.<sup>8</sup> The [preliminary budget](#) proposes \$210k in cuts and 5 fewer staff positions at BOC, when more oversight of the jails on Rikers is sorely needed, not less. Establishing a minimum budget linked to the number of people in custody would add 37 BOC staff positions (versus the preliminary budget), but would add only \$4.5M to the overall expense budget.<sup>9</sup>
- **Eliminate vacancies for DOC uniformed staff.**
  - The Department of Correction is budgeted for 7,060 uniformed officers, but as of January 1, 2025 they employed [5,908 and 1,152 positions were vacant](#).<sup>10</sup> DOC has not made a plan to rightsize this agency in alignment with reducing the

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<sup>8</sup> Other oversight agencies [like the CCRB](#) have minimum budgets linked to the size of the agency they oversee.

<sup>9</sup> The FY2026 projected budget allocates \$3.6M to BOC, for 30 staff; 67 staff would constitute 1% of the currently jail population (6,7000 people)

<sup>10</sup> Per Independent Budget Office

number of people in jail and closing Rikers. By eliminating uniformed vacancies, DOC could realize cost **savings of \$149.6M annually.**<sup>11</sup>

- **Reduce overtime spending** by consolidating operations and permanently closing jails on Rikers, starting with the vacant Anna M. Kross Center, where 109 officers are still assigned.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. Youth Represent: Critical Services for Youth**

With support from the New York City Council through the Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative and the Discharge Planning Initiative, Youth Represent provides reentry legal services for young people in their own communities. We are deliberate in serving Black, Latiné, Indigenous, and other youth of color who otherwise would not have access to legal services, while still prioritizing those with criminal legal system involvement. We have also expanded our age range from 24 and under to youth 26 and under. This is in response to growing research that shows our brains continue to develop into the mid-twenties, and addresses the very practical reality that our partner organizations often welcome participants over the age of 24.

We focus on young people living within New York City's five boroughs and are committed to providing inclusive and gender-affirming services to all youth. In 2024, 88% of our clients are people of color, including 49% Black, 26% Latinx, 6% multiracial, and 7% Asian. Our clients have an average age of 23, with nearly 20% being non-U.S. citizens and another 20% living in subsidized housing. Alarming, only 10% are employed full-time, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support. These statistics highlight the significant barriers our youth face in achieving stability and self-sufficiency, emphasizing the critical role Youth Represent plays in empowering marginalized young people to overcome systemic challenges and build brighter futures.

#### **Youth Represent: City Council Criminal Justice Programs Initiative Support**

City Council funding, through the **Innovative Criminal Justice Programs Initiative** and the **Discharge Planning Initiative**, has allowed us to provide critical legal services and mental health services for youth. This year we have requested an additional \$50,000—for a total request of \$125,000—which would allow us to increase our support for young people under the funding by 50% and respond to the already overwhelming demand we are seeing for our legal and mental health services in neighborhoods with the highest needs level. We hope that you will renew and expand funding for Youth Represent and that you will do so in the context of a just budget—investing in the full range of services and supports that young people and families rely on.

We thank the Council for considering this testimony and for committing to bettering the futures of young people in New York City.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on \$129,897 per officer, as [calculated by the Vera Institute](#).

<sup>12</sup> "Departmental Estimates - Fiscal Year 2026." Offices of Management and Budget, the City of New York, January 2025. [https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/concern/nyc\\_government\\_publications/pz50h083q](https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/concern/nyc_government_publications/pz50h083q).

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## Appendix

### A. Spoken Testimony of Jalyll Wright

Wassup ya I'm Jalyll better known as Jah. I am a Youth Mentor & leader from Youth Justice Network and I also just became a Youth Committee member at Youth Represent. Additionally I am a graduate of the Arches program at YJN which I completed after I came home on bail. I've struggled, bled sweat, prayed & cried to get where I'm at today. If it wasn't for the support, love & faith from my people believing in me I wouldn't be where i'm at today, before Arches & Youth Represent I didn't have any opportunities. I didn't know my rights, didn't know my worth or my purpose. The problem is we're poorly educated on life. We are so stuck on survival that we don't know how to live normally. That's how it is for most young men like me but it shouldn't be like that.

\The problems that we're seeing today in my community are lack of education, lack of support, the environment youth come from, poverty, and racial profiling. All these things lead youth to jail. We put too much money into detention centers and jail for youth. We fix this program by investing in the youth's future and listening to what we have to say. The city can do that by passing a budget that funds more programs. Programs that actually work and that young people like myself actually want to see. Programs that we need to invest in that fix the problem are boxing programs, artistic programs, mental health programs, political education and business programs.

Another way to fix the issues we face is investing in more organizations that do know your rights training. This is crucial because when young people know their rights, they can defend themselves in situations where they haven't done anything wrong but are being profiled based on their appearance, skin tone, how they dress, how they walk.

Where I'm from does not define who I am but where I'm from made me who I am today. That's the same for a lot of other young people like me in New York. They are worthy of support just like me, not incarceration. Thank you for listening.

### B. Spoken Testimony of Glen Williams

My name is Glen Williams, I am 25 years old. I grew up in the Bronx with a single mother with 8 siblings. Growing up was not easy and while I tried to help take care of my siblings, there were times when I was unable to stay at my house. I had to constantly overcome obstacles to preserve myself for better things. I was always taught to be polite and treat others with dignity. But like many young men in this city, I found myself caught in the system, facing consequences for mistakes I made in my youth.

When I was 20 years old, I was sentenced to three years of probation after serving 45 days for a misdemeanor conviction. The harsh reality of the NYC court system and the probation process easily pushed me further into a life of frustration and failure. It hurt me mentally, physically, and made me all around discouraged. Between being denied by employers, being homeless, and living in fear of being arrested again, I felt defeated.

The extended probation kept me in a state of constant stress and fear that I could easily be brought back behind bars. I had to manage not falling backwards in society, and I constantly grappled with the difficulty of not being able to get a job because of my record. For three years, I was rejected from every employer I applied to except 2 jobs. The frustration of being denied, over and over again, chipped away at my sense of self-worth, made me feel discouraged, and messed with my character.

Despite successfully completing my sentence, I continued to have encounters with the police, in which they would use excessive force against me. I have both experienced first hand and witnessed how the police are overly aggressive with black men that look like me and how they treat us badly in our own neighborhoods by physically and sexually harassing us and then claiming it is for their job.

What helped me move forward and past involvement with the criminal justice system was my involvement in numerous programs and resources that have changed my perspective. These re-entry programs and resources include programs like Youth Wrap, the Health People, Bronx Connect, Youth Represent, and Drive Change, which were all life changing for me. The programs I named above helped me get different certificates, such as my OSHA license, food handlers license, and connected to therapy, food pantries, and financial support. These programs eased the stress of everyday survival. The programs connected me to stipend programs that paid me and taught me how to properly interview at a job and have job placement services, as well as start having an income.

Therapy helped me overcome the mental health challenges I was dealing with and even ones I did not realize I was dealing with due to my involvement in the criminal justice system and abuse I endured growing up from my family. Health People, Youth Represent, and RiseBoro have provided me with mentorship and social worker support that has helped me learn how to make better choices and conduct myself in certain situations.

In addition to programs needing more funding, there needs to be more resources for supportive housing. More recently, as I was living in the shelter system in NYC, I often had interactions with the police simply because I was residing at a shelter or because I would have to carry my belongings with me at all times. This would result in me getting pulled back into the system and interrupt the progress I was making in building my life.



It's not just about the probation, itself. It was about the way the jail systems and corrections facilities seemed to trap me in a cycle where the consequences felt disproportionate to my actions even after probation. I am living proof that funding programs can help people avoid the system, because once I was connected to programming I began thriving while continuing to fight the uphill battle I continue to face due to my single conviction from when I was a young adult.

I'm living proof that the focus should be less on harsh sentences and more on rehabilitation and opportunities to reintegrate into society. The idea that increased funding can go towards additional police forces and correctional agencies only perpetrates this endless cycle of punishment. Young people should not have to get arrested and be on probation to get access to the resources and opportunities they need. Investing in people, through the programs that help create real opportunities to turn lives around is crucial and should be the main focus. I think the police, probation, and prison systems are overfunded and that only sustains the problem. Instead money should be redirected to programs that provide real tangible support, guidance, and give me, and others, a chance for a future. Endless punishment for young people needs to end and access to programming is crucial to that.

Thank you.

Jorjina Amefia-Koffi

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Children & Youth  
March 20th, 2025

Thank you to the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Jorjina Amefia-Koffi and I am a freelance Teaching Artist living in Brooklyn.

As a freelance Teaching Artist, I work with multiple arts organizations and schools in order to deliver English Language Arts (ELA) specific programming utilizing Dramatic Arts skills. City funding impacts my students through field trips, supplies, and learning various life skills like public speaking and editing.

As a Teaching Artist, I have seen many of my former students move onto successful careers and enter prestigious universities. I have even had the opportunity to work with former students as colleagues.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 33% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. Between 2020 and 2023, NYC public schools lost 14.8% full-time certified arts teachers — leaving thousands more students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. The combined impact of proposed budget cuts and the loss of federal stimulus money set to expire on June 30th stands to only widen this access gap for years to come.

Let us not take it out on our students or their future. Programs that foster student engagement, creativity, mental health, and community rejuvenation must be prioritized. We join our colleagues in asking the city to:

Hire certified arts teachers (\$38M): Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via supplemental certification program and filling arts staffing gaps (closing the equity gap for at least 307 schools).

Continue and increase "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding: Build on city's down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M.

Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$15M): Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$80.47, and require that money be spent on arts education.

Improve data transparency by compelling NYC Public Schools to provide a school-by-school breakdown of the state of arts education in public schools via a Legislative Services Request, T&C, and/or Oversight Hearing.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Warm regards,  
Jorjina Amefia-Koffi

**Testimony from Rebekah, a member of the Lower Eastside Girls Club and STARS CGI Initiative**  
**City Council FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing**  
**Committee on Children and Youth**  
**Thursday, March 20th, 2025**

Greetings, my name is Rebekah, and I am a 15 year old girl who is attending The Clinton School. I first want to thank committee members for the opportunity to speak today about the critical role nonprofits play in supporting youth development, youth mental health and why additional funding is essential for our communities.

I have personally experienced the impact of nonprofits always being there for everyone, even when they're in need of support. I have been a member of the Lower Eastside Girls Club (Girls Club) for 1/2 of my entire life, and I would 100% say I haven't regretted a second of my time here. I used to be isolated and lacked the motivation or drive to do anything. I was failing classes and had only trusted 2 people other than my family. The Girls Club allowed me to open my eyes and grasp what I want to be. I got to meet many young women, career women, and most of all, very kind and supportive people. They helped me set goals for myself, be kind to myself, and to others. They brought me to Stars Citywide Girls Initiative (STARS CGI) events where I was met with an opportunity to be a fellow and meet other people like me and speak about issues we were passionate about. We met and had vision sessions to share our ideas for the future, and laid out plans on how to achieve this. We held town halls and presented our ideas to the public. Here we showed that our young minds are capable and what would support us at this time.

Stars CGI and Girls Club introduced me to public speaking, it has grown me into standing up for myself, and thinking about a better future for communities. I will never forget the adults who made my current life happen. I changed for the better, seeing more of the harsh reality around us, but also the beauty of the world, and planning for everyone, not just some. I learned to be thoughtful of the diversity we have in New York City so everyone is heard. I learned to be confident, and how to maintain a good mental state. Without these non-profits, I wouldn't be standing where I am, many women wouldn't be where they are today. People have careers because of Girls Club and STARS. I can't repay them back other than being here today, representing them even though I feel nervous and anxious, I want to be here because these organizations matter to me.

Which is why I urge you to consider increasing funding for youth-serving nonprofits like Stars CGI and the Lower Eastside Girls Club. They are organizations committed to growing young leaders, they have helped people invest in their future, brought people together, and so so so much more. It is so important at this time.

In closing, youth wellbeing is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Initiatives like Stars CGI and organizations like the Girls Club play a vital role in ensuring young people like me have access to the care and support we all need to make mistakes, learn and grow. With continued and additional funding, they can continue to provide safe spaces, mentorship, and critical resources that truly change lives. I appreciate the opportunity to share my experience and advocate for increased support.

Let me remind you each one of us is a person, and we have different things that matter to us. These non profit organizations are the sole reason I stay standing up, and many other people would feel the same.

We young people are the future, and we need the help you can provide.

Thank you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Name: Jess Dann Kaiser

Address: Commissioner

I represent: ACS

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Name: Margaret Platenkott

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

I represent: ACS

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

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

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Thana Subag

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

I represent: THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

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: Alan Cheng

Address: First Deputy Commissioner

I represent: DYCD

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: Ira Yankwitz

Address: 85 Broad St.

I represent: Literary Assistance Center

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: Rachel Halman

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

I represent: Green Wood Cemetery

Address: DYCD

**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: Valerie Mollan

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

I represent: DYCD

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: Dana Cantelmi

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

I represent: DYCD

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

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mike Bobbit

Address: Deputy Commissioner

I represent: DYCD

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: Angelina Martinez Rubin

Address: Special Counsel

I represent: DYCD

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: Keith Howard

Address: Commissioner

I represent: DYCD

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

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Susan Haskell

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

I represent: DYCD

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: Daryl Rattray

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

I represent: DYCD

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: Galloway, the Ali Forney Center

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

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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: Khai JA Mendheim

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

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CAITLYN PASSARETTI

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

I represent: CITIZENS COMMITTEE For CHILDREN OF NY

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michelle Avila

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

I represent: Children's Aid

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: Sebastian Vante

Address: 209 East 125th Street NY, NY

I represent: Safe Horizon

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: Jasmine Reed

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

I represent: Figure Skating in Harlem

Address: 361 West 125th Street

**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: Anthony Rowe

Address: 520 8th Ave

I represent: Center for Justice Innovation

Address: 520 8th Avenue

▶ 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: 3/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: George Kottas

Address: The Bronx Defenders

I represent: (family defense panel)

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: Galloway, Ali Finner Center

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

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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: 3/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Riyali Basak

Address: Neighborhood Defender Enviro

I represent: NDS

Address: w/ panel family defense panel

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: James DaCosta

Address: [REDACTED] 104 NY 1016

I represent: METROPOLITAN EQUESTRIAN TEAM

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: Carlos C

Address: [REDACTED] st

I represent: Youth Represent

Address: 11 park place

**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: Graue Wang / Chinese-American Planning Council

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

I represent: CPC

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: 3/20/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nila Nataraian

Address: 112 39th St Suite 305

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

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: Emily Vexen

Address: [REDACTED] 11209

I represent: Center For Family Life in

Address: 443 39th St. Sunset Park

**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: Silas Dupigny - Student

Address: [REDACTED] 11232

I represent: Center for Family Life in Sunset

Address: 443 39th St. Park

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: 3/20/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: K Smarlyn Murshed

Address: GAH

I represent: Center for Family Representation.

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Budget Hearing  
Youth + Family Services  
Cm cuts - increase support  
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 20, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Constance Lesold

Address: [REDACTED] BKLYN

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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: Gregory Brender

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

I represent: Day Care Council of New York

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy Kohomban (CEO)

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

I represent: The Children's Village

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paula Magnus

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

I represent: Northside

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: 3/20/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: [REDACTED] Jamaica

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: 43 Madison Street 3F  
Brooklyn NY 11238

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carolina Laise - Chong

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

I represent: Northside

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: Tricia Mullen

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

I represent: Lehman College Adult Learning Center

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: Joshell Lawrence

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

I represent: The Alliance

Address: 11 park place Room 701, New York, NY 1007

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: Nevita Bailey

Address: CEC

I represent: DYCD

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Admin. ☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Denise Ramirez

Address: 123 William St

I represent: KMC DYCD

Address: 123 William St

**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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erica Conway DYCD

Address: 123 William Street

I represent: DYCD

Address: 123 William Street Apt. 41 10038

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Felicia Thornton

Address: 128 William Street / NYC 10017

I represent: Dyco

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: Brooke Fyffe

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

I represent: Groundswell

Address: Dyco

**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: Ashanti Bennons

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

I represent: Groundswell

Address: Dyco

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Journey Johnson

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

I represent: Armory College Prep

Address: DYCD

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lady Biena

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

I represent: Armory College Prep

Address: DYCD

**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: Rebekah Dzah

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

I represent: Armory College Prep

Address: DYCD

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mia Lema Lindao

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

I represent: Sadie Nash

Address: DYCD

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jonee Billy

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

I represent: Power Play NYC

Address: DYCD

**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: Shakeema North

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

I represent: Covenant House

Address: DYCD

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yi Lin Zhou

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

I represent: Girls for Gender Equity

Address: DYCD

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebekah Kwong

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

I represent: Lower East Side Girls Club

Address: DYCD

**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: Nate Duval

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

I represent: Groundswell

Address: DYCD

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vick Volonyk

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

I represent: Row New York

Address: DYCD

**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: Moomina Rehman

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

I represent: Groundswell

Address: DYCD

**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: Kha'ja Mendheim

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

I represent: CDF

Address: DYCD

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: DC Jeremy Halbridge

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

I represent: DYCD

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: 3-20-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr Sophie Charles

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

I represent: COFCCA

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Connolly

Address: 45 Broadway

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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Gullen

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

I represent: DYCD

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: Betty Garger

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

I represent: Junior Achievement of NY

Address: 200 W 41st St - Suite 800

NY NY 10036

**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: Roberto Rodriguez

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

I represent: Kingsbridge Heights Community

Address: 3101 Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

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: 3/20/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jason Alleyne

Address: 917 Battery Place Suite 305

I represent: Exalt

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: 3/20/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joan Kanarkiewicz

Address: [REDACTED] Woodside NY 11377

I represent: Make The Road NY

Address: 301 Grove Street, Brooklyn NY 11237

**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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: STNY

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: 3/20/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PSYCO Wilson

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

I represent: Youth Represent

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: Isabella Perez

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

I represent: Armory College Prep

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: Rachel Walman

Address: [REDACTED] Bk. NY 11215

I represent: The Green-Wood Cemetery

Address: 500 25th St. Bk, 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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jazmine Reed

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

I represent: Figure Skating in Harlem

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: Robin Veestra-VanderWeele

Address: [REDACTED] NY/NY 11025

I represent: Queens Community House

Address: 108-69 62nd Drive Forest Hills NY 11375

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